

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MESTIZO AND INDIGENOUS MAYAN YOUNG  
WOMEN IN GUATEMALA: ATTITUDES AND KNOWLEDGE OF SEXUAL  
REPRODUCTION AND HEALTH AMONG MEMBERS OF CHILDREN  
INTERNATIONAL'S YOUTH HEALTH CORPS

BY

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Global and International Studies and the Graduate  
Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts.

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Date approved: 4/15/11

## Abstract

Children International's Youth Health Corps Program uses Peer Education techniques to teach impoverished adolescents about Sexual Health and Reproduction. In the Youth Health Corps in Guatemala, both rural indigenous Maya youth and urban *mestizo* youth in Guatemala participate in the program together. In this comparative analysis of Kaqchikel Maya young women and non-indigenous young women in Guatemala, a written anonymous survey was administered to both groups of female participants to determine what similarities and differences exist in their beliefs and knowledge of sexual health and reproduction and sexuality. Although the groups have very different cultural backgrounds, their responses suggest that they are essentially interested in the same topics such as pregnancy and STD prevention. In addition, both groups of young women receive little information about sex from their parents, yet indigenous women are at a disadvantage to general reproductive knowledge as compared to their mestizo counterparts. The importance of protecting a woman's virginity and honor is also reflected in both groups' answers, although indigenous women appear to receive more warning about this than do non-indigenous adolescent women. Research suggests that parents play an extremely important role on how informed each group is on matters of sex and reproduction, as well as the values they hold with regard to the subject.

## Acknowledgments

I thank Children International and Health Program Coordinator, Kathy Osborn, for allowing me access to the various iterations of the Youth Health Corps Program Guides, as well as providing guidance regarding the inner workings of program. I am also extremely grateful to the staff in Children International's Guatemala City Agency who made this research possible and administered the surveys in my place. In particular, I would like to thank Field Officer Héctor Roché and Programs Facilitator Edwin Reyes for patiently answering all of my questions and providing their own insights into participant behavior. Not to be forgotten, I am indebted to my friend and Communications Coordinator, Javier Cárcamo, who was my constant sounding board for new ideas and analysis. His support was invaluable as he tracked down useful articles, reviewed my potential survey questions and even helped format the final surveys. Mickey Waxman, a Statistics Consultant, also deserves much recognition for teaching me the various functions of the SPSS program which made my numeric data analysis and charts possible. Finally, I thank my advisors, Professor Laura Herlihy, Dr. Mary Zimmerman and Professor Hal Wert, who took the time to read my thesis with a critical eye and allowed me to present this finished research project.

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## INTRODUCTION

Children International is a nonprofit organization based in Kansas City, Missouri that strives to help impoverished children and youth in eleven different countries around the world, including Guatemala, through its child sponsorship program. With a monthly donation from contributors or sponsors, sponsored children (ages 2 to 11) and youth (ages 12 to 19) receive benefits such as medical and dental care, school supplies, clothing and shoes, nutritional aide and educational support.

In January of 2009, Children International's two sponsorship agencies in Guatemala merged into one. Prior to that, for nearly thirty years Children International - Guatemala was composed of the Rural Guatemala Agency and the urban Guatemala City Agency. The Rural Guatemala Agency had a significantly higher number of indigenous Maya children and youth enrolled in the program than did the Guatemala City Agency, and was known by the Maya name *K'ato'ri A'cua'la* – Kaqchikel Maya words meaning “help for children”. In essence, the merge had little effect on the children as no community centers were closed and few, if any, program changes occurred. For adolescent members of the sponsorship program, the benefits to them remained the same, yet sponsored youth from urban and rural areas who participated in youth programs had the opportunity to interact for the first time. This is especially true for members of Children International's Youth Health Corps (YHC), which uses Peer Mentors to teach teens about sexual and reproductive health, hygiene, as well as the prevention of drug and alcohol abuse.

Most noteworthy in the Youth Health Corps is the mixing of indigenous Maya culture with urban, non-indigenous culture due to the two agencies coming together to form one. The Maya people in Guatemala are members of several indigenous subgroups who still maintain

much of their ancestral values and traditions. Often times the Maya speak their native language, in addition to Spanish, while some are monolingual Mayan language speakers. They tend to reside in rural areas, working as farmers or laborers. Maya women can often be identified by the typical clothing they wear, such as traditional woven shirts (*huipil*) and skirts (*corte*). *Ladinos* or *mestizo* people in Guatemala are a mix of Spanish and indigenous background, and they lead a somewhat more modern lifestyle than do the indigenous groups. Mestizos do not identify themselves as members of the indigenous culture, and are traditionally Spanish-speakers and are Catholic.

As members of different cultures, Maya peoples and non-indigenous mestizo people hold different world views and customs, which spread to views and knowledge on sex and sexuality as well. The newly hybrid Youth Health Corps is a setting in which these variations can be observed. The purpose of this paper is to provide a comparative analysis of young Kaqchikel Maya women and young mestizo women in Guatemala to better understand the motivations and reasons behind their knowledge and opinions on sexual health and reproduction. This paper is a project-based thesis which includes background information on mestizo and indigenous Maya populations regarding history, culture, sex and sexuality. Also included are the results of a written survey that Field Officers in Guatemala administered on my behalf in April of 2010, as I was unable to travel to Guatemala. In this applied study, I analyze the survey responses from female Youth Health Corps members and make recommendations for implementing the findings in Guatemala's Youth Health Corps.

## **A HISTORY OF FEMALE SEXUALITY AND SEX ROLES IN LATIN AMERICA**

Before Spanish colonization in the early 1500s, indigenous peoples of Guatemala held religious beliefs free of sexual taboo, restrictive ideals of sexuality and shame. Maya and other indigenous creation stories and mythology focus on a pantheon of gods and goddesses in which sexuality played an important role. In Maya mythology, the Moon Goddess, Ix Chel, is a sexually powerful goddess. In the Maya codices she can be seen having sex with many other gods, allowing her to bear offspring and create the Maya people (Herman, 2000, 1). “As the mother goddess for almost all Mayan peoples, she became, for a while, perhaps the most powerful god of all, surpassing the power of the Sun” (Herman, 2000, 5). At the beginning of the Moon Goddess legend, Ix Chel states “As a child I engaged in youthful sexual experimentation in order to learn my role in society. When I grew to an adult, my role became more clear [sic] as I ascertained what was needed to enable my people to survive” (3). Engaging in sexual activities gave Ix Chel the opportunity to understand herself and eventually marry the Sun. Both desired and feared, she then had the power to give life and cause death. The Maya worshipped Ix Chel for her power and sexual desirability. Herman explains that sexual desire was closely related to rituals which promoted warfare and sacrifice to maintain the gods (2001, xiv).

Sexual reproduction and sexuality were seen as powerful and necessary tools, and in fact, as Ana Amuchástegui suggests, “sexual activity, eroticism and reproduction were considered gifts from the gods to compensate mortals in order to make their suffering and pain in this world bearable” (2001, 260). This is in contrast with the Catholic view of life in which suffering and abstaining are ways to achieve purity and glory in the eyes of God. A member of the Kaqla Maya women’s group explains, “The cultures of the ancient towns lived sexuality to the fullest, without



the taboos that we have internalized and made our own now” (Grupo de mujeres Kaqla, 2004, 84).

When Spanish conquistadors and colonizers came to the New World, Catholic priests were not far behind. Observing the Maya religious ceremonies and, in their view, pornographic sculptures and writings, priests and their followers set about evangelizing the indigenous populations of Guatemala, as well as attempting to erase any trace of the previous religion. Pyramids were destroyed and Catholic churches built on top of the ruins.

Perhaps some of the most important players in the Spanish conquest of the indigenous people were the so-called Indian servants of the church who taught the priests indigenous language, giving them insight into indigenous religious beliefs. Priests used this knowledge to make connections between the previous religion and the Catholic religion. The Maya Moon Goddess, creator of the Maya people, became transformed into the Virgin mother (Herman, 2000). Stripped of all power and sexuality, the newly recreated goddess became the bridge between sinful indigenous belief and honorable Spanish Catholicism.

Once these beliefs were in place, Christian marriage was introduced among the populations. “Obvious continuities between pre-Hispanic and Catholic conceptions of marriage helped to impose...procreation, the condemnation of abortion, homosexuality and adultery, and the importance of female virginity” (Amuchástegui, 2001, 262-3), all of which were previously foreign concepts to the indigenous people of Guatemala. Little by little, the practices of confession and marriage began to undermine indigenous religious beliefs and culture, paving the way for Catholicism.

In short, the process of conquest and colonization by the Spanish brought about new conceptions of the body and its pleasures which were disseminated through a process of

individualization by which Indian social networks were damaged and controlled and which set the basis for the modern subject of sexuality (Amuchástegui, 2001, 263).

The Spanish brought ideas to the indigenous people that would forever change their lives.

In addition, they brought with them Iberian ideals of honor and shame that ruled the lives of colonial women. Women were expected to personify the characteristics of chastity and modesty of the Virgin Mary, and any small sexual misstep could ruin the family's honor. "Their sexual behavior (or rather lack of it) reflected upon the men associated with them. Thus a woman who defied these rules not only stained her own honor but also that of her father, her brother, and her husband" (Lipsett-Rivera, 1998, 179).

As Martha Few explains in her "Women Who Live Evil Lives":

The control of women's bodies and their sexuality, [was] a primary focus of colonial authority and power...In Spanish colonial society, the desire to "protect" certain women from sexual violence became institutionalized in policies designed to control marriage practices and limit women's sexual activity to Christian marriage and family. The goal was to encourage stable colonial settlements and discourage informal sexual liaisons between Spanish and Indian populations (2002, 44).

The code of honor and shame had very specific rules for female members of the household. Young women were to remain virgins upon marrying, married women were to remain faithful to their husbands even if their husbands were unfaithful to them, and widows were to wear black and mourn the loss of her husband until their own death. In order to ensure their virtue and protect their vulnerability, girls and women lived most of their lives behind the high walls of their homes, only going out in public with their husbands or fathers. In addition, any illegitimate children were also hidden behind the walls of the home or passed off as the children of honorless servants. The Catholic Church reinforced these gender ideals as the path to perfection. "Women who followed the Virgin's model were closer to God" (Eber & Rosenbaum,

1996, 329). Those who strayed from the Virgin's model were shut off from society, bringing dishonor to their families and to themselves.

Some women in colonial Guatemala did try to fight back against these oppressive conditions. In order to regain power over their own bodies, female sorcerers resorted to what was referred to as sexual magic. In response to male infidelity, physical abuse or abandonment, women cast spells and brewed potions made from their nail and hair clippings and even their own bodily fluids to punish men for harm done to them (Few, 2002, 52). Nevertheless, under the Spanish Inquisition, many of these so-called sorcerers were brought to trial and "marked as deviant and criminal practitioners of illegal religion" (Few, 2002, 68).

In modern day Guatemala women have gained many rights and a more liberal way of thinking prevails, yet some of the old colonial norms still can be seen. Women have earned the right to vote and are no longer prisoners in their homes. The Feminist Movements of the 1970s became popular as women openly discussed and demanded reproductive rights and more women began working outside the home. Nevertheless, despite separation of Church and State, the Catholic Church still holds sway over the viewpoints of the citizens. These historical and cultural norms are difficult to overcome.

Latin American professor of philosophy and humanities, Horst Nitschack, points out that even in literature written towards the end of the 1970s this typical configuration of male and female personalities could be seen. The family was still considered the nucleus of society in Latin America, including Guatemala. Women who refused to accept their role in society as mothers and wives and demanded their sexual independence would be considered "whores; which is to say, as second class women, women who 'sell themselves' and because of that do not deserve the respect or acknowledgement of the male subject" (2008, 13, my translation). Even as

the feminist movement was underway in Latin America, including Guatemala, these traditional views on women and chastity were being propagated through literature.

One such norm that plays out in many households today is the concept of *marianismo*. If *machismo* is the cult of virility, aggression, sexual prolificacy, and control over women in Latin America, then marianismo is its female counterpart. Marianismo, taking its name from the Virgin Mary, is a code of behavior for how “real women” should act, a way of following the example of the Catholic Virgin. The main characteristics are “semidivinity, moral superiority, and spiritual strength...[and] an infinite capacity for humility and sacrifice” (Stevens, 1994, 9). The perfect mother does everything for her family, always remaining submissive to the demands of the men in her life. Sexually, the practice of marianismo “dictates not only premarital chastity for all women, but postnuptial frigidity. ‘Good women’ do not enjoy coitus; they endure it when the duties of matrimony require it” (Stevens, 1994, 11). Although women have made major advancements politically and in the workplace, for many women in their personal lives and at home, the restrictive sexuality of their colonial Catholic sisters continue to dictate how honorable and decent women behave.

The other side of the gendered equation in Guatemala and in Latin America in general is the machista ideal of what a man should be and how he should behave. The attitude of *machismo* is one of a man who shows his hyper-masculinity by aggressive and sometimes violent and sexually prolific behavior. A macho husband controls his wife and expects her to raise the children and take care of the home, all the while serving him. By keeping control of his wife and her sexuality, he protects the family’s honor (Anderson et al, 2008). While this view of masculinity is slowly changing, many of machista attitudes towards women persist.

## **MAYA REPRESSION IN GUATEMALA AND RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS**

The Maya people have suffered through what W. G. Lovell calls “Three Cycles of Conquest.” (cited in Johnston & Low, 1995, 5). The first conquest, as previously noted, began in the sixteenth century when Spanish *conquistadores* enslaved, murdered, converted and exploited the Maya people. After gaining independence from Spain in 1821, Guatemala continued its cycle of conquest by reinstating forced labor for indigenous people, subdividing Maya lands and legalizing debt peonage (Johnston & Low, 1995). Finally, and perhaps the most well-known conquest was a product of armed, state-sanctioned military confrontation in Guatemala lasting thirty-six years until the Accord for a Firm and Lasting Peace was signed in 1996.

### **Civil War in Guatemala**

Although the civil war did not officially begin until 1960, the precursors to the war are important to note. With the election of President Jacobo Arbenz and his agrarian reform policies in 1952, more than 100,000 poor rural families benefitted from legalized unions, education reform and the equal distribution of land. In 1952 when much of the United Fruit Company’s land was expropriated, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower and the U.S. government began to fear the spread of communism in Guatemala. Because of this, the CIA began operation “PBFortune” and supplied weapons and money to paramilitary groups in Guatemala who opposed President Arbenz (Calderón, 2008).

On July 2, 1954, with U.S. support, Colonel Carlos Castillo led a successful coup to overthrow President Arbenz, and subsequently declared himself President of Guatemala (Calderón, 2008). As Wilkinson states, “The Castillo Armas regime dismantled a decade of reform in a matter of weeks” (2002, 185). As president, Castillo repealed agrarian reform, forcing poor Guatemalans to give back their land, removed voting rights for the illiterate and set

laws against communism which led to the imprisonment of thousands of suspected communists. According to Calderón, “the coup set the stage for Guatemala’s long and brutal civil war...Government military forces and right-wing militias battled leftist rebels, mostly Mayan insurgents, who were fighting for economic and social justice” (2008).

Despite the democratic election of President Mendez Montenegro in 1966, the situation in Guatemala did not improve. Violence between the left and right continued, and later it was discovered that President Mendez had an agreement with the Guatemalan army not to interfere with its war against left-wing guerrillas (Calderón, 2008). Mendez Montenegro’s election was just the first in a series of disappointing and oftentimes violent presidencies.

With the election of military commander Colonel Carlos Arana Osorio to President, the bloodshed increased as he suspended civil liberties in the country and gave the military total control to subdue leftist factions, and by March 1971 more than 700 political killings of labor leaders, students and politicians had taken place (Calderón, 2008). When General Fernando Lucas García took over as President in 1978 he “launched a campaign of unprecedented terror against any potential opposition” (Calderón, 2008), including the indigenous population. Much of the violence was focused on the indigenous communities of Guatemala’s central and western highlands, which “became the setting for the infamous “scorched earth” campaigns of the later 1970s and early 1980s, in which hundreds of Maya villages were quite literally wiped off the map” (Snodgrass Godoy, 2002, 642-3). (See Appendix 3 for a map of Guatemala.)

In 1982 General Efraín Ríos Montt took control over Guatemala in a coup, and although he only was in power for seventeen months, his reign was the cause of “the worst atrocities against the indigenous population” (Calderón, 2008). In *Terror on the Mountain*, Daniel Wilkinson interviews forty-some members of the rural Guatemalan town of Sacuchum, who

were anxious to have their stories heard. They explained that hundreds of army men surrounded the town and helicopters flew overhead. The townspeople were ordered out of their homes, some dragged out by their hair and into the center of town. Soldiers ransacked the houses and raped women. The army captain explained that they were believed to be on the guerrilla's side because they had offered them food, and for that, they would be punished. Likening the villagers to the water that sustain the fish (the guerrillas), the captain said to them "When the pond dries up, the fish dies. We're going to take care of you, so that the fish will die" (Wilkinson, 2002, 210).

The townspeople were herded to the soccer field and formed a line. Anyone who was on the list was taken away and killed. Several of the interviewees explained to Wilkinson the scene after the army had left:

It was around ten in the morning that we found the first bodies. They were half-buried, in ditches, five or six people in each ditch. There were my brothers. They had their throats slit. Many of them had their throats cut. Like animals. Some had been strangled. They put a cord around their neck, tied it to a stick, and turned the stick until they were choked. Forty-four people had been killed. And no shots had been fired...They cut out their tongues" (Wilkinson, 2002, 211).

Samson explains how innocent citizens became victims in the war, stating: "Regardless of [indigenous people's] involvement in revolutionary activity, the government's seeming attitude in many places was that to be Maya made one a subversive" (2007, 37).

In the El Quiché province alone, 344 villages were destroyed. Snodgrass Godoy suggests that the killings that took place in Maya towns and villages were not simply to stop members of the opposition or those who helped them. She explains:

Yet more than merely collective assassinations, these massacres were attempts to destroy society itself. Even when all human inhabitants of targeted villages had been killed or forced to flee, homes and crops were set afire; household implements were systematically destroyed; livestock and animals—horses, dogs, pigs—were killed. At times, when the Army abandoned a community following a massacre, it left bags of poisoned foodstuffs at the site of its encampment, or attempted to poison the water; every effort was made to

ensure that no one returning to the village could reestablish a settlement there (2002, 647).

Between 1970 and 1983 at least 50,000 people died in the war and 200,000 Guatemalans sought refuge in other countries to avoid persecution and violence. (Calderón, 2008).

Ríos Montt was eventually overthrown by General Mejía Victores and Vinicio Cerezo was elected President. Although the citizens of Guatemala had high hopes for his presidency, Cerezo extended amnesty to members of the army so they could not be prosecuted for human rights violations. Jorge Serrano Elias was elected President in 1991, but he was forced out of office due to accusations of corruption (Calderón, 2008).

After two years of peace talks, the guerrilla rebels declared a ceasefire in 1996 and the Peace Accords were signed. *El Acuerdo de paz firme y duradera* (The Accord of a Firm and Lasting Peace) included a section on recognizing the rights and identity of the indigenous towns (Congreso de la república de Guatemala, 1996), but it is worth noting that even during the signing of the accord, the Maya people were not represented. Estuardo Zapeta, formerly of the Center for the Study of Maya Culture, explained that the peace talks took place between the Guatemalan Government and the URNG (The National Revolutionary Union of Guatemala), both groups primarily made up of urban ladinos. Zapeta says, “Consequently, the ‘dialogue for peace’ is seen as a ‘monologue’ between two minorities who basically maintain the same colonial discourse,” and he goes on to add “It appears that in Guatemala, after 500 years, history repeats itself; two minorities are making decisions for the Mayan majority” (cited in Samson, 2007, 39).

The Maya had to hide their heritage for fear of bloody confrontations and other serious human rights violations. The Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) suggests that “these



events had a serious impact on certain elements of Mayan identity and disturbed the transmission of their culture from generation to generation”. This sentiment is echoed when Snodgrass Godoy states “Although new generations of Guatemalans now inhabit the places left vacant by the massacres, the social space which binds them is still haunted by its history of terror” (2002, 648).

Women were particularly affected by the violence and were “doubly or even triply targeted for violence because they were women, indigenous and rural poor, or *campesina*” (Duggan, et al, 2008, 201). Because many Maya women lived in isolated rural areas in the Guatemalan Highlands, without the protection of their male family members, they were more vulnerable to sexual and reproductive violence at the hands of the military. The military used rape and violence and the threat of such violence “to humiliate, to pressure others to provide information, to punish for any real or perceived support of the enemy and to instill terror” (Duggan et al, 2008, 203).

Here members of the Kaqla Maya women’s group in Guatemala reflect on the state of Maya repression:

The majority of us Guatemalan women walk with our feet close together, without looking anyone in the face, least of all men, because we carry the burden of oppression on our backs (Grupo de mujeres Kaqla, 2004, 42, my translation).

It is fundamental to take into account that when a town is dominated and oppressed for a long time, one learns not to respect oneself, not to value oneself and appreciate oneself (47, my translation).

Due to the cycles of repression, Maya men and women today still are characterized as timid and quiet, and women who were raped and tortured at the hands of the Guatemalan military, in many cases, have passed on to their daughters the meekness and fear impressed upon them during the war.

Although very few cases of war crimes and human rights abuses have gone to trial in Guatemala, in 1999 the U.N.-backed Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) released its study on the armed confrontation exposing the atrocities committed and made recommendations for reparations. The CEH registered over 42,000 official victims of murder and 6,159 forcible disappearances (Duggan, et al, 2008). In addition, the CEH specified that eighty-three percent of the victims were Maya. Some estimate the true number of victims to be somewhere around 200,000 (CEH, 1999). Having analyzed the actions of the Guatemalan military and government, the CEH found that in the period between 1981 and 1983 “agents of the State of Guatemala...committed acts of genocide against groups of Maya people” (CEH, 1999). The CEH report also found that ninety-three percent of all human rights violations were committed by Guatemalan security forces.

### **The Maya Movement**

Notably, the atrocities of the 1980's also propelled many Maya into action. The *Movimiento Maya*, The Maya Movement, was created as a movement “by and for the Maya towns, which has as its goal to affirm their political and cultural rights” (Garrard-Burnett, 2005, 51, my translation). In addition, the Peace Accords granted the Maya people specific cultural and political rights.

The indigenous people began to mobilize and form groups like CONIC, the National Indigenous and Peasant Coordinator, a large indigenous organization formed in July of 1992 made up of various Maya ethnic groups. It is an organization under which associations, committees, rural unions, guilds and other community organizations work. The slogan on their website is “Rescuing the Maya Culture and Fighting for the Earth and Territory... A Struggle for Life and Peace” (CONIC, my translation), and their main goal is to “drive and promote

sustainable development, with emphasis on the Maya town, and self-management on a national level through promotion and strengthening of the organization and the local power of the communities” (CONIC, my translation). Their projects include initiatives such as conserving Maya identity and basic rights, agrarian reform, creating social transformations for equality and ensuring the fulfillment of the Peace Accords.

In addition to far-reaching Maya groups, Maya women also began to organize even before the end of armed conflict. Women who were displaced by war began taking on leadership positions and representing their communities (Garrard-Burnett, 2005). As Barrios-Klée et al. notes, “once the Peace Accords were signed, the rural indigenous women’s organizations multiplied” (2001, 87). Indigenous women began forming groups and participating in organizations and workshops in which they learned skills for income generation, took classes to become literate, and acquired knowledge about women’s health (Barrios-Klée, 2001).

In Barrios-Klée’s study, she also found that as the indigenous women participated in the workshops they began to recognize and speak about their rights. These rights included a woman’s right to study, to participate, to speak, to work, to express themselves in their own language and wear their own traditional clothing. Perhaps most importantly they began to believe that they, as indigenous women, had the same rights as ladino Guatemalans and that they should have the same rights as men (2001, 91). The recognition of these rights has led to the formation of countless indigenous women’s organization in Guatemala, many of which have become political groups which advocate on behalf of Maya women.

## PROTESTANTISM IN MAYA COMMUNITIES

Despite the strong influence of Catholicism in Guatemala, the United States Department of State notes that while an estimated fifty to sixty percent of the population is Catholic, roughly forty percent is Protestant (US Dept of State). Protestant groups in Guatemala can include Presbyterians, Evangelicals, Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostals. Historian Virginia Garrard-Burnett places the percentage at thirty-five percent but notes that the percentage of Maya people who are Protestants is likely much higher (2005, 50).

Protestantism began making its mark on Guatemala in 1882 when President Justo Rufino Barrios invited the North American Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions to enter Guatemala, in what was essentially an official imposition of Protestantism (Wilson, 1997). John Clark Hill, a Presbyterian missionary, began the task of converting Guatemalans and “in the rural areas, it could be said that the institutional presence of the Catholic Church literally disappeared between 1880 and 1950” (Samandú, 1990, 70, my translation). The Protestant mission was to evangelize and civilize the indigenous ‘pagan’ towns. Much like the Catholic Church did when they first colonized the Americas, Protestants translated the Bible into the Mayan languages and trained indigenous leaders to become evangelizers (Samandú, 1990).

The Protestant church, however, took a different approach to cultural differences. Certain facets of indigenous religion and culture were dealt with by the eradication of deities, sacrifices and some ceremonies, yet another technique the missionaries used was substitution. Indigenous people who believed in supernatural beings such as *la llorona* (the crying woman) were not made to give up these ideas. Instead, these beings were given an acceptable new name – demons, entities which the Pentecostal Bible suggests are present in everyday life. Protestant missionaries substituted certain Maya gods and ceremonies for biblically accepted characters and stories. In

addition, “some indigenous traditions and customs were tolerated, although with modifications and limits” (Samandú, 1990, 95, my translation). For example, traditional Maya prophets who foresaw the future were not prohibited, because the Pentecostal Church believes in the power of revelations and messages sent by God. The Evangelical churches also tolerated some practices which did not represent a threat to their religion, such as traditional medicine or certain agricultural rituals (Samandú, 1990). Former agricultural rituals that involved the use of incense and candles when praying to the gods were switched to simply praying to God for a good harvest. This more accepting attitude led to creation of a certain religious syncretism among Maya groups.

Samandú suggests that the real “Evangelical Explosion” did not occur until the period of extreme political and social violence between 1960s and the 1970s when tens of thousands of people were killed, persecuted and displaced (1990, 72). In addition, Wilson states that “armed insurgency, death squads, intensification of religious concerns, and a major earthquake all created a search for reassurance” (1997, 149). He notes:

Several hundred thousand marginal Guatemalans found in Pentecostalism something...[that] gave them the confidence and motivation to confront their immediate anxieties and the quandaries of an uncertain future...while preserving values and codes of conduct that were familiar and therefore reassuring (1997,153).

Religious organizations such as CIEDEG, Conference of Evangelical Churches in Guatemala, were also formed to strengthen Maya religious solidarity. Maya Presbyterian Pastor, Vitalino Similox, leads the group and is active in the Maya Movement. In fact, almost all of the congregations that belong to CIEDEG are Maya and are located in areas of political violence and repression. One of the main goals of CIEDEG is to help obtain peace and regional reconciliation,

as well as contextualizing Christian beliefs with Maya spirituality (Garrard-Burnett, 2005, 53-55).

Typically, Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostals are much more religiously conservative than more mainstream Protestant and Catholic churchgoers. Political scientist Timothy Steigenga's research shows that these religious groups are more likely to believe that the end of times are coming and that Christ will return soon, as well as that God judges all those who do wrong, and those who violate God's laws must be punished by God. More orthodox Protestants also believe that the Bible must be interpreted literally because it is the word of God (2001).

Children International-Guatemala Field Officer in Patulul, Héctor Roché Chach offered his opinion on the religious behaviors of indigenous young women. Héctor has been with Children International-Guatemala since 1987 and is Kaqchikel Maya. He works with sponsored children and youth on a daily basis. Héctor expressed, "I think that especially the indigenous young ladies have a strong connection with the moral ideals of God, the Church and everything that entails" (my translation). This strong connection with God and the Church also extend into indigenous women's education on sexual health or lack thereof. Due to the restrictive ideals of their religion, discussing sex in depth would not be permitted and the topic of contraception would be particularly off limits.

Because of the conservative religious ideals that some Protestant groups in Guatemala promote, ethnologist Leslie Gill suggests in her 1990 study that "Belief in the innate inferiority of women is so firmly entrenched in Pentecostal ideology that many believers view the subordination of women as part of the natural order...[and] is sanctioned by God" (cited in Steigenga, 2001, 129). Steigenga's data, however, shows that despite the level of patriarchal rhetoric within Pentecostalism, some "conservative religious beliefs associated with

Pentecostalism are significantly and positively related to more favorable attitudes towards gender equality” (129). In the majority of Maya households, however, the man is still seen as the head of the household and in charge of daily activities. Maya women, on the other hand, typically perform domestic tasks and care for the children. Perhaps this more favorable attitude towards women can be associated with the numerous Maya women’s groups who have adopted such positions on women’s rights.

## **CURRENT LITERATURE ON ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY IN GUATEMALA**

### **Cultural ideals**

In discussing female adolescent sexuality in Latin America in general, anthropologist and clinical psychologist Norma Fuller Osores believes that female gender roles are beginning to change towards a more empowered woman. This change is due to women’s increased roles in the public sphere, which gives women other options for recognition other than simply being a good mother and caretaker. Adolescence is being redefined as well, as young women come into a new period of “erotic experimentation and preparation for entering into work and political space” (Fuller Osores, 2001, 226, my translation). Fuller Osores also believes that the idea that a woman’s worth resides in her sexual conduct is also losing ground as “sexual satisfaction becomes a demand and synonymous with psychological health” (2001, 228, my translation). With sexuality separate from reproduction, young women are free to seek out pleasure and new forms of social recognition outside the confines of the home, Fuller Osores believes.

She does point out that this modernity does not always apply in rural or poor urban areas where “the low expectations of becoming part of the public sphere can drive young women to opt for maternity as one of the few ways to achieve social recognition open to them” (2001, 233,

my translation). Fuller Osoreo seems to suggest that teen girls in rural areas or from low-income families choose motherhood as a way to be seen as women, yet it would appear that many women who experience pregnancy at a young age in Guatemala did not plan or choose to become pregnant. Lack of sexual knowledge and contraceptives is the more likely culprit. Also, in many indigenous communities, a woman is still judged on her sexual conduct, and her family takes steps to insure her virtue.

### **Marriage**

Among rural Maya young women, poverty is prevalent and marriage in their early teens is quite common. In fact, a recent study shows that 64% of indigenous women get married in their teens (Reynoso, 2009). “An indigenous woman looks for a solution to these enormous hardships, which leads fourteen to sixteen year old girls to marry. They are also educated to contract marriage at an early age” (Sotomayor, 2001, 87, my translation). In “Maya Woman and Rural Development in the Yucatan,” the authors interviewed a Maya woman who had married at the age of twelve. Originally, her single father wanted her to wait until she was a little older, but the fact that he was never home with her made this unrealistic. When he came home one day to find her sitting alone in the house with her eighteen year-old boyfriend, he immediately demanded that the boy’s guardians take her to live with them, presumably to protect her honor (Pinto González & Villagómez Valdés, 1997).

At times, indigenous youth use the honor-shame code to their advantage. In some Maya Guatemalan communities boyfriends will “steal” their girlfriends from their parents’ home, rather than asking for her hand in marriage – a situation which does not always result in an affirmative response. Once the couple returns it is assumed, and in most cases rightly so, that they have had sexual relations. Without any other option, the family must agree to the marriage



or face the family's reputation in the community being tarnished. Without the marriage, the family would most likely not allow the girl back in the home because she would be considered dirty and unworthy.

Non-indigenous urban poor teens also have a tendency to marry early. In a 1995 study of the poor community El Progreso in Guatemala City, Johnston and Low discovered similar patterns. "A girl is considered a woman when she has had sexual relations, or when she "has a husband" which can begin as early as 10-13 years of age" (51). These women go to live with their young husbands, but are often times abandoned by them. "Thus begins the roles of women as passive, dependent, and resigned, and yet having to confront the problems of raising, educating and feeding her children" (52-3). By contrast, middle-class ladino or mestizo and white teens in Guatemala do not typically marry until they have finished their education (McEwen, 2004).

### **Honor, Virginity and Dating**

Among the Maya community, conservative views of sexuality and sexual behaviors are commonplace. In some Maya communities, teens of the opposite sex are only to see each other in public spaces, yet some refrain from communication for fear of being misperceived. In anthropologist Ricardo Falla's 2005 ethnography of a young Maya woman named Alicia, this dynamic is shown. At the age of fourteen, Alicia tries to keep her relationship with her first boyfriend, Gabriel, a secret. When, inevitably, her father sees them together he angrily yells at her, "Don't you feel ashamed to be chatting with him in the street?" (2005, 25, my translation). After that encounter, Alicia is beaten in order to dissuade her from crossing the line in public again.

Religious ideals play a strong role in the virginity-before-marriage rule. In her 2008 study of modern-day Kaqchikel Maya sexuality, Emma Chirix found that in the city of Comalapa, Guatemala, virginity is valued just as much as marriage due to the fact that the majority of the citizens are Catholic or Evangelical (141). It is so important that some parents might even go so far as to check to see if their future daughter-in-law is a virgin. While premarital sexual relations are clearly not accepted, Chirix points out that “in everyday life, young women and men maintain clandestine relations” (2008, 141, my translation).

As noted, in the Maya culture, ideals of female chastity are extremely prevalent and “the topic of sexual relations is more delicate among indigenous youth, and there is more resistance to commenting on those topics” (Moscoso et.al, 2000, 88, my translation). In addition, young Maya girls are taught to be submissive, quiet and obey. According to Chirix, among the Kaqchikel Maya, mothers are the ones who inculcate “prohibition, fear and denial” (2008, 112, my translation) in their own daughters with respect to sexual relations. In order to instill fear in their teenage daughters not to have premarital sex, mothers may say things like “You have to take care of your body. Don’t you touch anyone. It’s dangerous if you are touched once... You’ll get pregnant fast” (Chirix, 2008, 112, my translation).

Societal pressures also do their part in keeping a young woman chaste. Again, Chirix states that a “deflowered woman is not well-looked upon; she is disqualified” (2008, 142, my translation). And some Kaqchikel men swear that they can tell if a woman is a virgin just by the way she walks. Other men say that a woman’s skin turns yellow when she is not a virgin (Chirix, 2008, 142).

These pressures appear to be transmitting their message clearly. As one participant in a 2000 study of youth ages 15 to 25 in Guatemala noted, “It is very important that one makes it to

marriage still a virgin, because supposedly it is a part of... women, it's part of a woman's purity" (Moscoso et. al, 2000, 88, my translation). In isolated rural communities where many Maya women live, the concept of honor and shame is more pronounced. In such small, close-knit towns gossip about the virginal status of a young woman can spread easily and bring shame to an entire family.

Ladino or mestizo and white teenagers in Guatemala have a somewhat more liberal adolescence, yet old Catholic norms still govern sexuality. Unlike some young Maya women, these teens are allowed to date publically. (McEwen, 2004). In addition, premarital sex is common among mestizo and white teens in Guatemala, although unwanted pregnancies are still seen as a stain on the family's honor:

If a teenage girl becomes pregnant, the course of action is directly dependent on her family's purchasing power: if marriage is out of the question, a wealthy girl may be sent abroad under the pretense of education, while the less affluent may spend her pregnancy at a distant relative's home...Abortion is a rare alternative; unwanted babies of *mestizo* or white teenagers are either put up for adoption or raised by a female member of the family (McEwen, 2004, 187).

This practice of hiding an unplanned pregnancy is not a far cry from the colonial Latin American woman living behind the high walls of her home in order to protect the family's good name.

### **Contraception**

Contraception in rural areas is limited and "presumed or real opposition by the [male] partner negatively affect their use" (Givaudan et. al, 2008, 198). A study of a Maya-Quiché community in Guatemala showed that there is serious religious and social opposition to family planning measures. In this community heavily influenced by Evangelical Protestant and Catholic beliefs, family planning was frowned upon, and young Maya women were not allowed to learn about it. In fact, they were reluctant to speak with the researchers, and could be beaten for

discussing contraception (Bertrand, et al. 1992, 61). Still other married women feared broaching the topic of family planning with their husbands because they worried their husbands would assume that they were being unfaithful.

Maya religious views also play a role in the mistrust of contraception. Modern Maya religion is a mix of old indigenous beliefs and Catholic or Protestant beliefs. Indigenous culture teaches that every woman is born with all of the children she will have already inside her. In some Maya communities, women wear necklaces with each bead symbolizing a child. The mixture of indigenous and Catholic beliefs can be better understood through the statement of one woman interviewed: “[family planning]... is a sin because the Virgin Mary has put a necklace on each of us and we have to fulfill this obligation” (Bertrand, et. al, 1992, 61). Childbearing is seen as an obligation to God, and contraception is a sin.

A 1995 study conducted in Sololá, Guatemala with indigenous families reinforces the idea that in Guatemalan communities contraceptive measures are less widely used. Of the men and women interviewed, fifty-four percent said that family planning was a taboo topic. Another forty-three percent mentioned that it was a sinful topic, while twenty-nine percent said that family planning was non-existent (Castellanos & López, 2002, 20).

A conversation with Children International-Guatemala’s Héctor Roché Chach also suggested a low instance of contraceptive use. According to Héctor, the most available contraception method among sponsored indigenous youth is condoms, however, he points out that due to the shame implied in purchasing them, very few young men buy them.

## **Parental Influence on Sex and Sexuality**

“The attitudes, beliefs, values and stereotypes towards sex before and within a marriage are not being dealt with in an open manner, which contributes to myths and taboos that don’t favor [good] health.”

– Psychologist, María del Pilar Grazioso  
(in Toro-Alfonso, 2007, 351, my translation)

Parental silence on the topic of sex seems to be nearly universal among the findings in the research from Guatemala. This is especially true among rural indigenous populations in Guatemala according to Moscoso et al who suggest that “Discussing matters of sex in the families or communities is still considered taboo. Parents do not teach their children about sex” (2000, 48, my translation). In her research, Chirix takes it a step further suggesting that Kaqchikel parents avoid talking about sex by using excuses like “I don’t have time.” Others instill the idea that discussing anything sexual is taboo with warnings like “Those are dirty words” (2008, 137, my translation). In this way they avoid having to broach the subject again by instilling a sense of shame in their children.

Participants in Moscoso et al’s study also affirmed the idea of parental avoidance and silence in regards to sex talk. “In the rural areas, you almost don’t see this, they don’t talk about that there” (86, my translation) remarked one participant. Chirix suggests various reasons parents have for the refusing to discuss sexual matters with their children. Some parents prohibit teaching children about sex because they fear they will awaken their sexual desires and believe that their adolescent sons and daughters can learn about sex as they go, once they are married. Still other parents admit that they do not have enough information on the subject to teach their children, and therefore, the school system should accept the responsibility (Chirix, 2009, 136).

In Falla's ethnography of a young Maya woman, Alicia's story points to some of the consequences of parental silence on even basic, biological topics like puberty. Here she explains her confusion and fear at having her first menstrual period at the age of twelve:

I didn't say anything to my mom, because I was afraid. We didn't know anything about that, because they hadn't talked to us about it. I didn't say anything to my older sisters either...And a month passed, and I had another, and I began to let it go. I just remember thinking 'What is happening to me?' (Falla, 2005, 20, my translation).

The same Maya woman discussed earlier in the Pinto González and Villagómez Valdés study who married her eighteen year-old boyfriend at the age of twelve had similar problems when she became pregnant. After attending a family party and being nauseated by the smell of food, she was sent to a local Maya healer who told her she was expecting. Not having received any sexual education from her single father, she was confused. She asked her husband "They say I'm pregant [sic]. What's that?" Her husband replied that he didn't know either. When she asked his aunt, she simply said "You'll see when the time comes. The only thing I can tell you is you're going to get fatter" (1997, 120-2, my translation). No one seemed to know how to explain to the young Maya woman what her body was going through, how it happened or what to expect.

Another Kaqla Maya woman sums up the fears of young Maya women who lack knowledge of puberty and sexuality:

The lack of information about the topic generated a lot of insecurity within me, since they never told me things, and [there were] other things that I never dared to ask. That is the story for the majority of women when we have our first menstruation, we don't know anything about it and about the changes in our body. The values and norms about virginity, saving oneself for marriage weighed heavily on me (Grupo de mujeres maya Kaqla, 2004, 92, my translation).

In addition to fear and confusion, lack of communication on sexual matters can lead to harsh consequences such as unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Even when young women marry, the situation does not improve in most cases. "Communication about sex-

related issues is virtually nonexistent, and women often leave the decision about contraceptive use to their husband” (Givaudan, 2008, 1999). Without general knowledge of sexual reproduction and sexuality, young women are unable to take control of their own bodies, leading to higher than average birth rates among Maya women.

Despite parent’s unwillingness to educate their children about sex, a young participant in Moscoso’s study suggests that children do look for orientation from their parents, but often feel intimidated. “It’s hard for us to talk about that subject. However, many of us get flustered or we feel ashamed to touch upon that topic. I mean, parents are going to think ‘I wonder what he or she is doing?’” (2000, 86-7, my translation). Very few youth actually have the courage to ask their parents as indicated by the comments of this young woman: “Sometimes it’s kind of hard. I am always a little scared with my mom, because she could think something like that, but I ask her” (87, my translation).

Unable to acquire in depth sexual knowledge from their parents, many Guatemalan youth report that they seek out friends to help fill in the information gaps and learn about their bodies. “But what a lot of us do is turn to a guy friend or a girl friend, whether it’s a man or a woman” (Moscoso, et al, 2000, 87, my translation) explains one Guatemalan participant. Youth must constantly evaluate if what they have learned is accurate or not.

Teens also glean some sexual knowledge from radio, television, magazines and newspapers. Chirix notes that teens read the magazine *Sexo Libre* (Free Sex) or stare wide-eyed at eroticized advertisements in the Guatemalan newspaper *Nuestro Diario* (2008, 112). Although not all young people have access to the same mediums, particularly Maya youth in rural areas, they still “manage to receive a minimum dose of information about sex” (Chirix, 2008, 112, my translation). In this way, youth find a way around the parental silence they encounter at home.

Anthropologist Manuela Camus also notes that the Maya are often thought of as a traditional and conservative society, in which sex is not discussed. However, Camus believes that the situation is beginning to change, particularly for young indigenous men. They have more access to education on sex and sexuality, have more freedom and are better informed than their parents. Despite this increase in information, Camus warns that the level of knowledge on sexual matters is still extremely lacking (Camus, 2000).

### **Formal Sex Education**

Guatemala has a state-sanctioned sexual education program, in addition to a number of independent organizations that seek to educate children and youth on sex, reproduction and health. While separation of church and state is a formal law, the Catholic Church still has some sway over sexual education.

In Guatemala sexual education begins in elementary school as part of the mandatory Natural Sciences curriculum. Sexual education is imparted in sixth grade and in middle school, and students learn about the sex organs, menstruation and ejaculation. According to Chirix, there is very minimal talk about the psychological or affective aspects of sex, and absolutely no discussion of love or pleasure (2008, 136). Notably, many impoverished Maya children drop out of school in elementary school or shortly after elementary school to help maintain their families. When children leave school early, it is quite possible that they miss out on the sexual education taught in sixth grade and middle school, leading to less informed Maya children.

The Minister of Education also has a program directed at preventing the transmission of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (Palencia, 2005). Nevertheless, many teachers still consider the subject taboo, and some even refuse to teach it in class. Some parents in Guatemala



agree, and suggest that teaching children how to use condoms and other contraceptives will encourage youth to try out their newfound knowledge.

In addition, the Family Planning Law ordered the Ministries of Health and Education to take action on including a curriculum for teens about rights and responsibilities of sex. The law was approved in 2006; however, sixty percent of teens say that they have not received sexual education in their educational establishments (Reynoso, 2009).

Organizations working in coordination with the Ministry of Health say that past sexual health strategies have failed because The Ministry of Education “uses conservative methods, and the institution’s texts have a religious focus, with a lack of technical and scientific knowledge” (Reynoso, 2009, my translation). Mirna Montenegro from Guatemala’s Reproductive Health Observatory also criticizes the Ministry of Education, citing that it printed sexual education pamphlets that state that “the sex act is a unique act that is carried out between spouses, based on love” (Reynoso, 2009, my translation). Montenegro then points out that the majority of Guatemalans live in common-law arrangements, making the concept of sex only during marriage outdated.

Teens acknowledge the education that they receive in school, yet often times it is not enough. A participant in Moscoso et. al’s study says that “in the education center, we receive courses [and] talks regularly every year, more than anything about diseases, how they are transmitted, yet many of us don’t think it’s important, and that’s when mistakes are made” (2000, 86, my translation). Falla’s Alicia also remembers receiving information about pregnancy in school, but she still conceived a child at age fourteen. She states that she knew she could get pregnant during her period, but she had not been taught how to protect herself from unwanted pregnancies (Falla, 2005, 42-3).

To combat lack of information and even misinformation, organizations like the Guatemalan Association for Sexual Education (AGES in Spanish) and the Association for the Wellbeing of Guatemalan Families (Aprofam) teach young people to give informational chats in public schools on sexual reproduction. The idea is that youth will feel less inhibited receiving sexual education from a member of their peers (Palencia, 2005).

The Catholic Church in Guatemala also has its own Sexual and Affectionate Relations plan, called *Education for Love*, which they debuted in 2007. Some of the basic tenants of the program are the following: Family values, abstinence and fidelity prevent pregnancies and diseases, contraceptive methods offend the dignity of a person and having an affectionate life does not only mean having sexual relations (Palencia, 2007). Many sexual education organizations in Guatemala have denounced this plan as having little scientific basis and not being based on the World Health Organization's established ideals. In addition they take aim at the church's claim that condoms do not prevent the spread of HIV (Palencia, 2007).

In November of 2009 the Catholic Church fought back against organizations in Guatemala which promote sexual education and the Federal Family Planning Law, citing that it is unconstitutional for the government to mandate sexual education (Ramírez, 2009). The church believes that imparting sexual and reproductive education to children should be left to parents, because some of the materials given in school could promote abortion or promiscuity (Chirix, 2008, 136-7).

Nevertheless, the Ministries of Health and Education developed a pilot plan for sexual education which was put in place in six Departments where the highest number of teen pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections were reported. The Ministries hope to have

implemented comprehensive sexual education in the majority of schools by 2015 (Prensa Libre, 2010).

### **Current Statistics on Sexuality in Guatemala**

Despite a lack of comprehensive education on sexual health and reproduction, many teens in Guatemala are sexually active. By the age of twenty years, 70 percent of women in Guatemala have had their first sexual encounter, and the average age for loss of virginity is age 18.5 years. This age is slightly younger for teens in rural areas (Moscoso et. Al, 2000, 48). The 2002 Survey of Mother and Infant Health in Guatemala also found that nearly one fifth of all adolescent women had their first sexual relation before their fifteenth birthday (Palencia, 2005). Once again, the age for the first sexual experience is younger for women living in rural areas than in urban areas.

Contraceptive education and use in Guatemala is also somewhat low. A 1998 study found that less than half of Guatemalan youth had a basic concept of modern contraception methods (Moscoso et. al, 2000, 48). In addition, although women between the ages of 15 and 19 years have the most access to media, they make up the group with the least amount of information about family planning. Consequently, they use fewer contraceptives. Those who do use contraception commonly use the pill, IUDs, injections and periodic abstinence (Moscoso et al, 2000, 49). A study conducted by the Guatemala Department of State in 1988 found that only 10.4 percent of women and 14.9 percent of men had used contraception during their first sexual encounter (Moscoso et al, 2000, 48). This number was even higher in the 2002 study, with almost 92 percent of young women responding that they did not use any method of contraception their first time (Palencia, 2005).

Studies have also shown that Maya women use fewer contraceptives on average than non-indigenous women. From 1978 to 1998 the use of birth control methods (including sterilization, rhythm, withdrawal and modern birth control methods) for Maya women increased by only nine percent. The percentage for ladinos increased by 23 percent (Bertrand, Seiber & Escudero, 2000, 1). It was found that the Maya had less access to services than did ladinos and that Maya with a secondary education were 5.8 times more likely to use some contraceptive method than those with no schooling (14). In addition, Bertrand suggests that “In the eyes of many Mayans, the promotion of family planning reflects similar genocidal motives” (3) as the most brutal period of military occupation in the 1980s.

Lastly, a 2006 study found that Maya women who migrate to Guatemala City had limited contraceptive knowledge, and only 26 percent of women from rural areas between the ages of 15 and 49 used modern contraceptives, while 47 percent of urban women did (Herrera Hernández & Lindstrom, 2006, 146).

The lack of contraceptive use corresponds to elevated birthrate among young women in Guatemala. There are over 100 births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 (Salles, 1997), and 44% of women under the age of 20 have at least one child (Reynoso, 2009).

## **CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL’S YOUTH HEALTH CORPS: A PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

Children International’s Youth Health Corps (YHC) began in January of 2005 for youth ages 12 to 19 years. Since 2005, there have been three iterations of the Youth Health Corps Program Guide – a 2005 version, a 2007 revision and the latest 2010 edition. According to the 2010 Youth Health Corp Training Guide, the goal and mission of the YHC is as follows:

To empower youth through the promotion and development of good communication and decision making skills, so that they may incorporate healthy and safe practices into

everyday life. For maximum impact, the program incorporates relevant concepts and themes that appear in everyday life for today's youth – reproductive health and substance abuse. This training provides youth with a timely, accurate, and comprehensive set of skills and information at an elemental stage in participants' mental and physical development (Children International, 2010, 6).

The core health topics covered in the Youth Health Corps program are reproductive anatomy, pregnancy, parenting, contraceptives, sexually transmitted infections (including HIV/AIDS), and substance abuse (CI, 2010, 6). The three key components of the program are Peer Education, Life Skills and Health as a Human Right. Life Skills are emphasized because they are “critical psychosocial and interpersonal skills [youth] need” (CI, 2010, 5) in order to put the knowledge they gain into practice. Children International also believes that “by educating young people about their right to health, the program can not only educate about specific threats to health, but can also prepare young people to be advocates for the rights of other youth in their community” (CI, 2007, 1).

Each sponsorship agency in each particular country asks for at least fifty sponsored youth volunteers between the ages of twelve and nineteen from each service area to become Peer Educators or PEs. This is up from twenty-five Peer Educators in previous years. Twenty-five to thirty of the PEs are expected to be new members, and the remaining fifteen to twenty are returning members (CI, 2010, 23). These peer educators are then trained by program facilitators and co-facilitators through a series of workshops and retreats on subjects related to health and wellbeing. Facilitators are adult staff members from the agency, and co-facilitators are sponsored youth who “participate in and supervise multiplication activities and act as trusted confidant[s] to peer educators” (CI, 2010, 6).

Each Peer Educator is given the responsibility of disseminating or “multiplying” the information learned during each training by sharing it with forty to fifty other youth in his or her

community. This multiplication of information to youth is called “peer contact” (CI, 2010, 24).

Children International believes that, due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter, training youth to spread the message is a more effective way of educating youth about the various health topics. As the summary states,

“It is never easy to discuss topics like human sexuality or personal hygiene with young people...But regardless of the level of sensitivity, the door to dialogue must be open. Open, because the risk of not tackling these topics can lead to a disempowered population unaware of how to avoid sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies and unhealthy life choices” (CI, YHC Summary, 2005).

Peer Educators have an advantage over traditional adult teachers for various reasons.

Young people are more likely to listen to and imitate their well-versed peers. Peer Educators can serve as healthy role models for other youth in the program, and Peer Educators can help youth both in the session setting and out in their communities. In addition, youth trained as Peer Educators learn valuable training and presentation skills and gain self-confidence (CI, 2007, 2).

The Peer Educator Training for first year participants is based on a series of five workshops. The first workshop entitled “Reproductive Anatomy and Adolescent Hygiene” serves as the basis for many of the other workshops to come. This workshop includes charts and graphics of male and female reproductive anatomy, as well as correct vocabulary terms. To learn concepts on anatomy and hygiene, Peer Educators play match games with vocabulary and take “Fact or Fiction” quizzes (CI, 2010, 136).

Perhaps the most important workshop in terms of this research, workshop two deals with pregnancy and parenthood. According to the Training Manual, in this module participants will gain “a basic understanding of fertilization, pregnancy, and the consequences of early, unplanned pregnancy...Participants will also participate in the “self-esteem building” life skills session” (CI, 2010, 159). The purpose of the self-esteem building section is to empower teens with the

skills and confidence necessary to make good decisions regarding sex. This workshop also teaches the Acronym ABC which stands for Abstinence, Being faithful to one's partner and using Condoms (both male and female) and other pregnancy prevention medications and devices such as the pill, IUDs, and even emergency contraception.

Workshop three is an extension of the previous workshop and familiarizes participants with the contraceptive methods available to them. The goals for this workshop are for youth to be able to “identify at least four different pregnancy and STI prevention methods” and “understand and demonstrate the process and concepts involved in making good decisions” (CI, 2010, 192).

Workshop four specifically tackles the subject of HIV/AIDS and how to prevent it, as well as giving them a basic understanding of other sexually transmitted infections. The life skill learned in this section is assertiveness. Through the various charts and role-playing activities, Peer Educators learn about the most common infections, their symptoms and the importance of early treatment. In the discussion of HIV/AIDS participants learn the truths and misconceptions about the disease (CI, 2010, 201).

The final workshop on Tobacco, Alcohol and other Substance Abuse focuses on how these drugs can negatively affect one's health. Activities in the module also help PEs to prevent substance abuse problems. Youth learn common reasons why peers begin using drugs and alcohol, and learn negotiation and refusal techniques to empower themselves and stay away from the substances (CI, 2010, 223).

The 2010 YHC Program Guide also included a new section for second-year Peer Educators designed to meet the goal of retaining 90% of Peer Educators. Although they have already learned basic information in their first year as Peer Educators, second-year PEs are

encouraged to attend first year workshops in order to refresh their memory on the subjects, as well as to form relationships with new members. Second-year participants are required to attend three new workshops which build upon their knowledge. These workshops are Advanced Reproductive Health, Advanced Pregnancy and Parenting and Physical, Sexual and Psychological Abuse (CI, 2010, 238). Second-year participants are a valuable source of information and support for new members.

Another important update included in the 2010 Youth Health Corp Training Manual was the addition of a section on adapting the program to the local context and an entire new chapter about community involvement. The manual encourages facilitators to gain a better understanding of the “reproductive health knowledge, attitudes, and practices of the youth [they] work with and the other community members that become involved with or have the ability to influence the program” (CI, 2010, 15).

Starting with 2010, each YHC Program at each sponsorship agency is encouraged to implement a community building activity, with the overarching goal of “developing a greater community appreciation for programs that work to improve adolescent health outcomes, such as the YHC” (CI, 2010, 306). Because of the difficult nature of new projects like this, the 2010 Training Manual includes a chapter that discusses Addressing Controversy and Dispelling Misconceptions, Fostering Community Support and Managing Sensitive Situations in order to have a successful outcome. Community involvement and adapting the program for specific populations is especially important in the case of Guatemala, in which the sponsored population is not as homogenous as it might be in other sponsorship agencies.



## RESEARCH METHODS

### The Youth Health Corps in Guatemala

I wrote to Programs Facilitator in Guatemala, Edwin Reyes, to obtain some basic information specific to the YHC program in Guatemala. What follows is information that he provided to me. For the year 2010, there were 234 youth participating in the Youth Health Corps in Guatemala. One hundred forty-one of the participants were young women, and ninety-three of the participants were young men. Edwin pointed out that sixty percent of the participants are female, and that “this is very important because they are the ones who are most affected by reproductive health risks” (my translation). According to Reyes, approximately forty percent of all participants are indigenous. Of the young ladies who are participating, fifty of them, or thirty-five percent are indigenous.

The service areas with the largest indigenous populations are Tecpán and Chimaltenango, which are primarily Kaqchikel Maya. The other six service areas that the Guatemala Agency serves have a low number of indigenous youth, which is reflected in the number of indigenous youth participating in the YHC in those areas. In general, there are fewer indigenous youth in the entire sponsored population.

I asked Edwin specifically about the differences he notes between indigenous and non-indigenous girls with respect to their knowledge and attitudes on the topic of sex, and how their behavior differs during the YHC workshops and meetings. Reyes replied that “perhaps, because of the environment in which they develop, the non-indigenous young ladies have a little more information” (my translation). He also notes that:

Although both groups have some information about sexual health and reproduction, the indigenous young ladies are more reserved in their opinion about sexuality, and the attitudes of the non-indigenous young ladies are more liberal (my translation).

In regard to interactions within the activities, Reyes observes that the two groups interact with each other without difficulty, but “perhaps the non-indigenous girls are more extroverted.” And “both groups take initiative and get involved without any problems” (my translation).

Reyes explained that before the merging of the rural agency and the Guatemala City agency, each agency would carry out one Youth Health Corp workshop each weekend. Now that the eight service areas are a part of just one agency, each weekend the agency must carry out two or three workshops on the same subject each weekend in order to have space for all of the youth from the service areas who wish to participate. Reyes notes that because there are additional workshops taking place, the agency has had to enlist the help of trained personnel from other organizations. Due to the merger, Edwin Reyes says that he has less time to interact with the youth as he used to, when he would interact with the same groups of youth each month. Now, because he has so many more youth, he interacts with them less frequently.

When asked about parental involvement in the program and general attitudes parents had about the Youth Health Corps, Edwin explained that at the beginning of each year parents are invited to a Parent Orientation event. Mothers attend this event more than do fathers. Edwin also states that at the end of 2010, the parents were invited to an end-of-year event for youth. During the event parents were informed of the goals achieved in the YHC. According to Reyes, parents’ impression of the Youth Health Corps has been positive. The parents “have expressed that the topics imparted to the youth are very important, and that it will help them a lot in their lives. The parents have recognized their neglect in teaching their children about sexual and reproductive health” (my translation).

Reyes also provided information about the Youth Health Corps retreat that takes place every year. This year, due to the merging of the rural and urban agencies, it was necessary to carry out two retreats, each retreat with youth from four service areas. Each year there is space for thirty youth from each service area for a total of 120 youth at each retreat. In order to participate in the retreat and the YHC in general, the youth must satisfy an interview in which they are evaluated on their availability, their maturity, their responsibility and other areas. Any youth age twelve to nineteen is eligible to interview to be a member of the YHC, but Edwin notes that priority is given to twenty-five new youth from each area, “since the program is designed for new youth.”

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

In order to better understand the difference between young Kaqchikel Maya women and young non-indigenous women’s attitudes, beliefs and knowledge of sex and sexuality, I created a nine-question, short answer survey for the female members of Children International’s Youth Health Corps (YHC) in Guatemala. While no pre-testing was conducted, I compiled the questions based on trends I found in researching attitudes and knowledge of sex in Maya and Non-Maya populations in Guatemala, data from interviews and stories that Children International has written about sponsored youth in Guatemala, and information that Children International Communication’s Coordinator in Guatemala, Javier Cárcamo, provided me personally. Cárcamo reviewed the survey questions and gave me his opinions on which questions would provide the best or most open responses. Because he works with youth in Children International’s sponsorship program often, he was able to direct me in rewording and clarifying some questions. He also assisted me in formatting the surveys.

The written survey form was chosen as the most expedient way to obtain information from the girls without having to conduct personal interviews myself or have someone in Guatemala conduct them in my place. In addition, I expected that anonymous surveys would elicit more honest responses from the young women than if they had to answer the questions out loud to someone they do not know (me) or even to a Children International staff member in Guatemala with whom they were familiar, but might not necessarily be willing to or feel comfortable with answering the questions. Even if I were to administer the surveys myself in written form, it is possible that the girls' answers could have been influenced, so I believe that the responses are more reliable because they were administered by the Field Officers with whom the girls are familiar and comfortable. I decided on nine questions only, so as not to tire the participants and to provide myself with a more manageable data set.

While retaining their anonymity, at the top of each survey the girls were asked to self-report on three questions: how long they had been participating in the YHC, if they were indigenous or non-indigenous and their age. Although being able to ascertain the difference between indigenous Maya and non-Maya young women is at the heart of my research, I thought it would be helpful to have those two other pieces of information. It was important to know how long they had been in the YHC because the training they had received might influence their answers and opinions on sex and sexuality. In addition, I wanted to know the age of the participant to be able to see whether or not age made any difference in a young woman's knowledge and attitudes regardless of ethnicity.

The nine short answer questions were a combination of general information and opinion questions. Two of the questions focused on what young women hoped to learn or felt was most important for girls to learn about in the YHC. Two questions asked girls to explain with whom

they would feel comfortable and would not feel comfortable discussing issues of sex and sexuality and why. Four of the questions centered on where the girls obtained their information about sex and what they had learned so far. One question specifically asked the young women about their opinions on sex. A copy of the surveys (English and Spanish) can be found in Appendices 1 and 2.

Since I was unable to physically distribute the surveys to the women due to geographic and time restraints, the surveys were sent to Communications Coordinator, Javier Cárcamo, who then gave them to Edwin Reyes, the Facilitator of Programs who works very closely with the youth in the Youth Health Corps. Edwin is also a graduate of Children International's child sponsorship program. Upon receiving the surveys, it was decided that the most convenient time to conduct the surveys would be during the first Youth Health Corps retreat of the year, held in April of 2010. The retreat is designed for both new and current YHC members and Peer Mentors (male and female) who spend a two-day weekend together performing team-building activities, being introduced to the YHC, receiving their initial trainings and getting to know each other.

Due to the large size of the YHC in Guatemala after the merging of the Rural and Guatemala City agencies, the groups of youth had to be split into two separate retreats. These surveys were conducted during the first group retreat with youth from four service areas. Two of the areas were rural areas; Tecpán and Chimaltenango – where the majority of girls are Kaqchikel Maya, and two were urban areas of Guatemala City; Tierra Nueva and Periférico. (See Appendix 3 for a Map of Guatemala.) The surveys were administered on the morning of the second day of the retreat. All female Youth Health Corps members present at the retreat filled out the surveys.

Although typically YHC events are carried out in mixed groups, for expediency sake, the girls were separated into their four service areas when they were given the surveys. Young men YHC participants did not take the surveys, as they are not a part of my research. In addition, I felt the presence of male peers could influence the way the girls answered the questions.

The surveys were administered by Children International Field Officials acting as chaperones during the retreat. Three of the Officials were women; one – the Field Official from Tecpán – was a former sponsored male. On the morning of the survey, the girls were reported to be in high spirits and well-rested and saw the surveys as just another part of the program, although there were questions as to why the young men were not participating also.

When the surveys were handed out the Field Officials explained to the girls that they should answer three demographic questions at the top, but that the surveys were completely anonymous. In addition, the Officials explained that the surveys were personal, not to be filled out in group form and that they could use the back of the sheet if they needed more space. Edwin Reyes does admit that on some of the questions, instances of girls working together was probable because the girls have very close friendships, and they might have consulted with each other on a few of the questions. Girls were also advised to be as open and honest as possible when filling out the surveys. According to Reyes, the surveys took approximately twenty minutes for the girls to complete.

## **ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

A week after the surveys were conducted, I received the stack of completed paper surveys from our Agency in Guatemala. I gave each survey participant a number, one through fifty-seven so I could keep my data organized. I then set about the task of translating all fifty-

seven surveys from Spanish to English, being careful to maintain the original meaning of each answer. All participant responses cited in the analysis are my own direct translations.

It became obvious that I would need a scientific way to analyze my data, so I decided to use the SPSS PASW Statistics GradPack version 18 to help me organize my responses. Because SPSS is a numbers-driven statistical program, it was necessary to convert all of my answers into numeric data. To do this, I reviewed all of the written answers given for each question, and searched for identical or similar answers given, and chose several categories into which most answers could be summarized. Answers that did not fit neatly into my chosen categories or answers that were given at very low frequencies (one or two) were placed into the category denominated “Other”. Although the “Other” category complicates the analysis, I felt it was necessary to include it, and then explain other answers given in the analysis portion. In SPSS, answers that fit into a category were given a one value, while answers that were not mentioned received a null value.

I used the SPSS functions to find Frequencies, Means, Basic Crosstabs and particularly Multiple Response Crosstabs to note the differences between indigenous and non-indigenous responses. Because almost all questions in the survey were short-answer and open-ended, participants were allowed to give multiple answers for the same questions. Due to this, in nearly all cases throughout this analysis, the percentages will not add up to 100. In the charts, (N) refers to the *number* of young women who actually gave the response, while percentage is the *percentage* of young women for each particular group who gave the particular response.

To supplement my numerical data, I have also incorporated many of the girls’ exact quotes from the written surveys I received to show exactly how the girls answered the questions. This is especially necessary to explain ‘Other’ answers which do not fall into one particular

category. In addition, throughout the analysis, it is important to note that the terms mestizo, ladino and non-indigenous are used interchangeably for girls who did not identify themselves as indigenous.

### **General Participant Information**

A total of 57 female participants completed the surveys, comprising 100% of young women present during the retreat. Of those participants, thirty-three percent, or 19, of the young women surveyed identified themselves as indigenous, in this case Kaqchikel Maya, and 38 said they were non-indigenous – exactly twice the number of indigenous girls. This is in line with Reyes’ data that shows that thirty-five percent of female participants are indigenous. I consider my group of participants to be an accurate, representative sampling of youth who are actually participating in the program.

For non-indigenous participants, the majority of the girls were between the ages of 14 and 15. For Indigenous participants, the ages were more spread out with five 17 year-olds and eight girls between the ages of 14 and 15. For all participants the average age of participation was 14 years and 10 months.

The majority of all young women at the retreat, nearly 72%, were just beginning their participation in the Youth Health Corps – 74% of non-indigenous girls and 68% of indigenous girls were new to the program. Again, this fits with Edwin Reyes’ explanation that the program is designed for youth who are new to the program and that they are given preference over second or third year participants. 17.5% of participants had been in the program for one year, and 10.5% of the girls had been in the program for two years or more.



### **Short-Answer Question Analysis**

The first question I asked the girls was regarding what information or topics they considered were most important to them. Specifically, I asked “What do you most hope to learn from the YHC, or what has been the most valuable thing you have learned so far?” I then gave them the following suggestions for topics in parenthesis: Reproductive Anatomy, STD Prevention, Personal Hygiene, Pregnancy Prevention, and etc. I asked this question in the hopes of both discovering which subjects they personally were looking forward to learning more information about and to obtain a judgment of which topics were most important or necessary for each girl. I provided the suggestion examples not to lead the girls, but to get them started thinking about the various topics in the YHC, since this was the very first question in the survey.

For this question, Pregnancy Prevention was the most widely given answer among both groups. Nearly 65% of all girls surveyed, 37 of the 57 participants listed Pregnancy Prevention as something they wished to learn more about or as the most valuable thing they had learned so far. Sixty-five point four percent of ladino girls mentioned it, and 57.9% of Maya girls did. Given Guatemala’s extremely high birthrate, especially among poor families, and the young average age for a woman to have her first child, the interest in pregnancy prevention is understandable. In addition, the general sponsorship program, as well as the Youth Health Corps, stresses the importance of education as a way to ease the burden of poverty, so it is also likely that these young women relate having a child at an early age as leading to an end to their education and possibly their chances of avoiding a low-income existence.

After the common answer of pregnancy prevention, the difference between indigenous girls’ and non-indigenous girls’ answers to question one begins to be seen. For non-indigenous ladies, the prevention of sexual transmitted diseases, followed by learning about reproductive

anatomy and biological functions carry importance. For Kaqchikel Maya adolescents, almost 52% mentioned some other topic. Third after “Other”, was STD Prevention, closely followed by Reproductive Anatomy and Biological Functions. A higher percentage of Maya girls mentioned Anatomy than did non-Maya girls, although Anatomy came in fourth place in order of importance. This difference suggests that Maya girls have less knowledge on the subject of reproductive anatomy and biological functions.

Returning to the high percentage of “Other” answers from indigenous participants, some examples of these other topics include health as a right, drugs, gender and sex before marriage. It is interesting to note that the topic of rights shows up in several of the answers from indigenous Maya girls, perhaps due to the persecution their people faced in the past and still face today. It is also possible that during Health Corps meeting in their respective communities, basic rights are more widely discussed in the indigenous groups.

Indigenous participants were also more likely to give more value-driven answers in the “Other” category. Participant 43, who had been in the program for a year, said that she wanted to know “how to deal with men who are only looking for sex”. Participant 44 mentioned the need to abstain from sex until marriage. Participant 46, a second-year member, also mentioned not engaging in intercourse before marriage, but took it a step further stating “I have learned that you should not have sex without love and without being married because it is dangerous, and then later, the woman feels like she isn’t loved, because she feels like she is worthless”. Her answer carries a heavy moral judgment on the way young women should behave, very reminiscent of historical findings and current research.

Although I never specifically asked the participants if they were sexually active or had ever engaged in sexual activity, the fact that both groups of young women noted pregnancy

prevention and sexually transmitted disease prevention among their top three answers for information that would be useful to themselves could suggest that some of them are sexually active. I refrained from asking such a direct question in my survey, because, despite the surveys being anonymous, I did not believe I would receive reliable answers to the question of current sexual activity due to the stigma attached to it in both communities. If the young women believed that one of her peers could see her survey or even that one of the Field Officers administering the survey could recognize her handwriting, it is possible that the survey taker would answer 'no' to protect her reputation and honor among the group. Because honor and shame seem very strong among indigenous populations, this might be particularly true on a Maya girl's survey.

### **Question 1: Hope to learn / Most valuable info learned in YHC**

<b>Mestizo Participants</b>			<b>Indigenous Participants</b>		
<b>Rank Order of Response Given</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>(N)</b>	<b>Rank Order of Response Given</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>(N)</b>
1. Pregnancy Prevention	68.4%	(26)	1. Pregnancy Prevention	57.9%	(11)
2. STD Prevention	36.8%	(14)	2. Other	52.6%	(10)
3. Anatomy / Biological	28.9%	(11)	3. STD Prevention	42.1%	(8)
4. Other	26.3%	(10)	4. Anatomy / Biological	36.8%	(7)
5. Hygiene	10.5%	(4)	5. Hygiene	10.5%	(2)
6. All options mentioned	7.9%	(3)	6. Health	5.3%	(1)
7. Make Friends / Gain Confidence	5.3%	(2)	- Make Friends / Gain Confidence	---	(0)
8. Health	2.6 %	(1)	- All options mentioned	---	(0)
Total Mestizo Respondents		(38)	Total Indigenous Respondents		(19)

% – percentage of participants who gave the particular answer

N – number of participants who gave the particular answer

For the first part of question number two, I asked the participants to state which Youth Health Corps topics they felt were the most important for all young women in the YHC to learn, and to explain their answers. The purpose behind this question was to gauge where the ladies thought information was lacking among their female peers and for them to give their opinion on which topics should be most important or useful. I did not supply them with any suggestions for this question, leaving the participants open to give answers not included in the list from the previous question or even make recommendations for new topics to be imparted. One indigenous participant did not supply any answer to this question, so the number of participants is reduced by one.

Once again, the vast majority of all participants responded that Pregnancy Prevention was the most important topic for young ladies in the YHC to learn. This time an even greater percentage, almost 78%, noted it – 86.8% of ladino girls and 61.1% of indigenous girls. Interestingly enough, girls mentioned more often that it was an important topic for their peers to learn than for themselves. “Other” was the second most commonly mentioned response for both groups on this question. For non-indigenous girls, examples of such non-categorical answers are drugs, development and even the incorrect notion of contracting AIDS through vaccines (Participant 8). Several girls also simply answered YHC, Youth Health Corps. I assume these girls helped each other on this question when they could not think of an answer.

As was the case with the previous question, indigenous girls whose answers fell in the “Other” category focused on morals and values. They mentioned subjects like drugs, not making mistakes with men, not having sexual relations at an early age, and emotional health. Participant 43 brought up the subject of religion, although she was not sure how to answer the question. “I don’t know,” she said. “Because some [young ladies] are interested in learning about sex, and

others aren't because they are Evangelical". And the topic of marriage rights was mentioned by survey-taker number 54 who said "Rights, because we have the right to get married not because we are obligated, but because we want to". Indigenous participants gave more open, normative answers to the question of what the most important topic for young women was.

The third most popular subject of importance mentioned for non-indigenous young women was STD prevention, just as they had mentioned it in question one. This could suggest that non-indigenous women are more sexually active or at least they believe that their peers are sexually active and need to learn to protect themselves. On the other hand, 27.8% of indigenous Maya young women mentioned third-most that their peers should learn specific information about sex and reproduction - once again suggesting that Maya young women believe others have little basic knowledge of sexual reproduction.

### Question 2a: Most important topic for girls to learn in YHC

Mestizo Participants			Indigenous Participants		
Rank Order of Response Given	%	(N)	Rank Order of Response Given	%	(N)
1. Pregnancy Prevention	86.8%	(33)	1. Pregnancy Prevention	61.1%	(11)
2. Other	15.8%	(6)	2. Other	33.3%	(6)
3. STD Prevention	10.5%	(4)	3. Specifics about Sex & Reproduction	27.8%	(5)
4. Hygiene	7.9%	(3)	4. Health as a Right	11.1%	(2)
5. Sex vs. Gender	5.3%	(2)	4. STD Prevention	11.1%	(2)
6. Health as a Right	2.6%	(1)	5. Hygiene	5.6%	(1)
6. Specifics about Sex & Reproduction	2.6%	(1)	- Sex vs. Gender	---	(0)
Total Mestizo Respondents		(38)	Total Indigenous Respondents		(18)

% – percentage of participants who gave the particular answer

N – number of participants who gave the particular answer

The second part of question two asked participants why they thought a particular topic imparted through the YHC would be most important for teen girls to learn. I asked this hoping to better understand their motivations for choosing the mentioned topic. Because one participant did not answer the question at all and fifteen other participants did not provide an explanation, the analysis of this question is based on forty-one answers only.

For non-indigenous participants the most commonly given reason for choosing a particular topic was because it was interesting, important, necessary or it was something that affects all women. Unfortunately, this was not a particularly telling answer, as it provided very little extra information on the participants' motivation. The second most mentioned reason, however, was to be expected. Given that the majority of non-indigenous young women mentioned that pregnancy prevention was an important topic for teen girls to learn, it is logical that their reasoning behind this would not only be to prevent pregnancy, but to prevent early-age pregnancies. Not far behind this answer, participants noted that not learning about a certain subject can lead to regrets and mistakes. Participant 10 commented on the importance of education by stating that learning how to prevent pregnancies was important, because "if not, [one] can't continue with one's studies."

The third most common reason given was Other and included responses regarding having to have an abortion, not wanting bad things that happen to other girls to happen to themselves, learning the value of a woman, and not falling into lies people tell.

Indigenous Maya girls' answers mostly fell into two categories: preventing pregnancy at an early age and Other. Once again, the preventing teen pregnancy corresponds to the high percentage of girls who mentioned pregnancy prevention in the first part of this question. "Other" answers varied greatly from being able to decide when to have a baby and women's

rights as mentioned in the first part of question two, to Participant 57 specifically noting that learning about reproductive anatomy was important “because no one tells us how our bodies work.”

Like their mestizo counterparts, indigenous girls’ third most mentioned answer was that not learning about the topic could lead to regrets and future problems. Indigenous Participant 55 said that learning about pregnancy prevention was necessary because “it could ruin our lives,” and Participant 39 said that learning about health as a right and sex were important “because all young women have to apply it in their daily lives and not make serious mistakes and later regret it.” Although both non-indigenous and indigenous young women answered that lack of information on a topic can have bad consequences, the reasons suggested by indigenous girls had a more urgent tone.

### Question 2b: Why is it an important topic to learn?

Mestizo Participants		Indigenous Participants	
Rank Order of Response Given	% (N)	Rank Order of Response Given	% (N)
1. Interesting / Important / Necessary / Affects Women	31.0% (9)	1. Prevent Early-Age Pregnancy	33.3% (4)
2. Prevent Early-Age Pregnancy	27.6% (8)	1. Other	33.3% (4)
3. Lack of Info = Regrets / Mistakes / Bad Future	20.7% (6)	2. Lack of Info = Regrets / Mistakes / Bad Future	25.0% (3)
3. Other	20.7% (6)	3. Interesting / Important / Necessary / Affects Women	16.7% (2)
4. Ability to Protect Oneself	17.2% (5)	4. Learn Consequences	8.3% (1)
5. Risk to Oneself / Child	10.3% (3)	4. Risk to Oneself / Child	8.3% (1)
6. Learn Consequences	6.9% (2)	- Ability to Protect Oneself	--- (0)
Total Mestizo Respondents	(29)	Total Indigenous Respondents	(12)

% – percentage of participants who gave the particular answer

N – number of participants who gave the particular answer

Question three deals with whom girls turn to with their questions on sex and relationships and why. I posed this question because I wanted to understand what kind of resources or support systems young women in Guatemala had when they had questions, worries or doubts about sex. I also wanted to see if the issue of parental silence was a factor for these young ladies. One indigenous participant left this question blank, so the analysis for this question is based on 56 survey answers.

Again for question three non-indigenous ladino girls and indigenous Maya girls shared the same most commonly mentioned answer. Fifty percent of indigenous participants and 39.5% of non-indigenous participants said they talk to their mothers when they have questions about sex and relationships. After the mention of mothers, the answers begin to diverge again for both groups. Ladino participants mentioned female friends as a close runner-up to mother with 31.6%, followed by Other. After Other, they mentioned parents, other teenagers and knowledgeable adult or specialist with the same frequency – 10.5%. Conversely, indigenous girls' second-most mentioned response was a tie between talking to a sister and a knowledgeable adult or specialist, both receiving 22.2% of mentions.

Both groups' willingness to talk to their mothers does not follow exactly some of the previous research, which suggests that young women, especially indigenous young women, fear discussing sex with their mothers. On the other hand, perhaps it does fit in with Chirix's research which states that mothers are the ones who impart sexual knowledge in their children. Non-indigenous girls turning to female friends with questions does support current research, while Maya girls preferring to speak with sisters over friends makes sense due to the importance of family ties among indigenous families.



Lastly, indigenous young women mentioning the desire to speak with a knowledgeable adult or specialist, again suggests lack of informed adults in their communities or a lack of adults with whom to speak. Once again, Field Officer Héctor Roché backs this idea up by affirming that “the majority of the parents are illiterate. They believe that youth shouldn’t know about [sex] until they get married” (my translation).

### Question 3a: Who do you talk to about sex?

Mestizo Participants		Indigenous Participants	
Rank Order of Response Given	% (N)	Rank Order of Response Given	% (N)
1. Mother	39.5% (15)	1. Mother	50.0% (9)
2. Female Friend(s)	31.6% (12)	2. Sister	22.2% (4)
3. Other	13.2% (5)	2. Specialist / Knowledgeable Adult	22.2% (4)
4. Parents	10.5% (4)	3. Female Friend(s)	16.7% (3)
4. Teens	10.5% (4)	4. Parents	11.1% (2)
4. Specialist / Knowledgeable Adult	10.5% (4)	5. Nonspecific Friend	5.6% (1)
5. Sister	7.9% (3)	5. Teacher	5.6% (1)
6. Teacher	5.3% (2)	5. Nobody	5.6% (1)
6. Female Classmate	5.3% (2)	- Female Classmate	--- (0)
6. Nobody	5.3% (2)	- Teens	--- (0)
- Nonspecific Friend	--- (0)	- Other	--- (0)
Total Mestizo Respondents	(38)	Total Indigenous Respondents	(18)

% – percentage of participants who gave the particular answer

N – number of participants who gave the particular answer

A second part to question three asked for an explanation as to why each participant turns to the mentioned person for advice and information about sex. Although not every girl provided

a reason, an interesting difference between indigenous and non-indigenous girls can be noted here. For both groups the issue of *confianza*, or trust, was stated most often when explaining with whom they would discuss sexual matters. For indigenous girls, the second most mentioned motive for talking about sex with someone was because that person was knowledgeable on the subject. Half of all indigenous girls mentioned this. Non-indigenous girls cited knowledge third most, with Other taking second place. When regarding a friend or peer, Other answers given were reasons such as getting more in-depth explanations, being the same age and understanding each other better and having more communication. When the answer was ‘mother’, reasons such as a mother being more understanding or being the right person to talk to were mentioned.

It is also noteworthy that while nearly 20% of non-indigenous girls suggested that feeling comfortable with someone was necessary for them to be able to talk about the topic of sex, none of the indigenous girls did. With the research showing that in indigenous communities often times a stigma is attached to any sex-talk, it is surprising that no indigenous girls mentioned comfort as a necessity to discuss sex with someone.

### **Question 3b: Reason for talking to the person(s) mentioned about sex?**

<b>Mestizo Participants</b>		<b>Indigenous Participants</b>	
<b>Rank Order of Response Given</b>	<b>% (N)</b>	<b>Rank Order of Response Given</b>	<b>% (N)</b>
1. Trust	58.1% (18)	1. Trust	57.1% (8)
2. Other	45.2% (14)	2. Knowledgeable	50.0% (7)
3. Knowledgeable	22.6% (7)	3. Other	14.3% (2)
4. Feel Comfortable	19.4% (6)	- Feel Comfortable	--- (0)
Total Mestizo Respondents	(31)	Total Indigenous Respondents	(14)

% – percentage of participants who gave the particular answer

N – number of participants who gave the particular answer

Question four asked girls with whom they would not feel comfortable discussing sex. I asked this question to get an idea of other possible motivations, beliefs or taboos that the women might share. The data below is based on 55 survey responses. Two non-indigenous participants gave answers that did not satisfy the question asked. They responded with “For me it is very strange” and “I would like to talk to him/her about sex because so he/she learns. So they don’t do it. What if they had a disease?”

Answers varied more on this question than on previous questions, yet not wanting to discuss sexual topics with men and adults was common amongst both groups of young women. Non-indigenous girls stated most often that they would not feel comfortable talking with their fathers about sex. Slightly over twenty-six percent of indigenous girls also noted their father as someone they would not speak to about sex, but the most common answer for them was Other Family Member. Other family members listed were stepfathers, stepbrothers, uncles, aunts and grandparents. Given that it is not uncommon for members of the extended family to live together in one home or at least very nearby in indigenous communities, it makes sense that indigenous Maya girls would have more of a selection of people with whom to speak about, or in this case, not speak about sex.

Nearly 28% of mestizo participants also noted that they would not like to broach the subject of sex with their parents, while 21.1% of indigenous girls said the same. The third most mentioned group for non-indigenous young women was men in general and male friends. Surprisingly, fewer indigenous women noted that they would not speak to men or male friends, despite research that suggests indigenous women are taught to avoid men in order to salvage their honor in the eyes of the community.

### Question 4a: Who do you NOT feel comfortable talking to about sex?

Mestizo Participants		Indigenous Participants	
Rank Order of Response Given	% (N)	Rank Order of Response Given	% (N)
1. Father	30.6% (11)	1. Other Family Member	31.6% (6)
2. Parents	27.8% (10)	2. Father	26.3% (5)
3. Male Friends	13.9% (5)	3. Parents	21.1% (4)
3. Male (General)	13.9% (5)	4. Brother	10.5% (2)
4. Female Friends	11.1% (4)	4. Adults	10.5% (2)
5. Other	8.3% (3)	4. Male Friends	10.5% (2)
6. Adults	5.6% (2)	4. Female Friends	10.5% (2)
6. Other Family Member	5.6% (2)	4. Other	10.5% (2)
6. Sister	5.6% (2)	5. Sister	5.3% (1)
7. Brother	2.8% (1)	5. Male (General)	5.3% (1)
Total Mestizo Respondents	(36)	Total Indigenous Respondents	(19)

% – percentage of participants who gave the particular answer

N – number of participants who gave the particular answer

Like question three, I also asked girls to explain why they would not feel comfortable talking with certain people about sexual topics in question four. Again, not all participants explained their answers, but I still was able to obtain a meaningful amount of responses. The highest percentage of responses for both groups was Other, but I will first focus on the next most mentioned reasons. Indigenous and non-indigenous participants both noted at 35.7% frequency and 29.4% frequency that they would not discuss sex with someone due to feeling embarrassed or uncomfortable. However, the next set of responses is more telling. Ladino young women went back to the notion of trust, while indigenous girls were more focused on how the people they discussed sex with might react – specifically thinking badly of them, being angry or provoking

fear. Participant 46 stated “I don’t want to talk to my dad because he gets mad and says ‘You want to leave the house with some man.’”

Examples of answers for the most common Other response for non-indigenous girls are that adults “beat around the bush” (Participant 9), or that parents and adults have other viewpoints on the subject. Participant 26 suggested that her dad was a man and “they don’t know what you ask them about”. Also one participant said that she wouldn’t talk to her friends because they take everything to have a double meaning, referring to sexual innuendos.

Indigenous girls whose answers fell into the Other category said things like not wanting others to think bad things about them. Participant 39, for example, said that adults “might correct us and we would feel bad”, and Participant 48 said she could not talk with her male or female friends because “maybe they’d realize the doubts I have, and they’d think that I don’t get along well with my mom”. Another participant, number 54, said she would not talk to male friends because “they are very outrageous when they talk about that”. She also mentioned that her grandparents have old beliefs and “make up things that aren’t [true]”. Finally, Participant 47 said that she talked to her mother once about sex, but that she had not “talked with her since because she doesn’t know much”. Once again the issue of parental knowledge on sexual reproduction is called into question among indigenous respondents.

**Question 4b: Reason for NOT discussing sex with person(s) mentioned?**

Mestizo Participants		Indigenous Participants	
Rank Order of Response Given	% (N)	Rank Order of Response Given	% (N)
1. Other	41.2% (14)	1. Other	42.9% (6)
2. Embarrassed/ Uncomfortable	29.4% (10)	2. Embarrassed/ Uncomfortable	35.7% (5)
3. Trust	26.5% (9)	3. Think Badly / Anger / Fear	21.4% (3)
4. Think Badly / Anger / Fear	8.8% (3)	4. Trust	7.1% (1)
4. Different Gender	8.8% (3)	4. Different Gender	7.1% (1)
5. Misunderstanding / Communication Issue	5.9% (2)	4. Misunderstanding / Communication Issue	7.1% (1)
Total Mestizo Respondents	(34)	Total Indigenous Respondents	(14)

% – percentage of participants who gave the particular answer

N – number of participants who gave the particular answer

In question five I wanted to know where the young participants were getting their information and learning about sex. I gave them these suggestions in parenthesis: No one, parents, school, friends, partner, television, etc. By asking this question I was both hoping to corroborate some of the existing research about where adolescents in Guatemala learn about sex, and to see perhaps where the gaps in education were.

The most common response for non-indigenous girls and indigenous girls was that they had learned about sex in school. Although this answer gained the highest percentage of responses among both groups, the percentage difference between mestizo and Kaqchikel Maya girls is large. Ninety-two point one percent of all non-indigenous girls said school, while 68.4% of indigenous girls cited school. This suggests that despite being a mandatory curriculum item, over 30% of indigenous girls surveyed were not being taught about sex in school. This does match existing statistics of indigenous populations having less access to sexual education. Perhaps

because of this lack of school education on the subjects of sex and sexuality, the second most listed place for indigenous girls to receive information was the Youth Health Corps, followed by parents, then friends.

Non-indigenous young women listed parents second, closely followed by friends. In addition, 31.6% of mestizo teen girls also listed television as a source of information about sex. Only one indigenous participant listed television, and no indigenous girls listed the internet as a place to access information. This data points to the lack of technology available to indigenous girls, who in many cases only have the opportunity to watch television or use a computer when they are at one of Children International's community centers. Non-indigenous girls, on the other hand, typically live in more urban areas where these communication mediums are common.

Notably not one non-indigenous participant listed her mother as a source of sexual information even though they indicate discussing sexual matters with their mothers in previous questions. Perhaps it could be that the response 'mother' is included in the 'parents' response, which garnered several responses. Two indigenous young women did, however, did list their mothers as a source of information about sex.

### Question 5: Where do you obtain information about sex?

Mestizo Participants		Indigenous Participants	
Rank Order of Response Given	% (N)	Rank Order of Response Given	% (N)
1. School	92.1% (35)	1. School	68.4% (13)
2. Parents	36.8% (14)	2. YHC / CI Program	36.8% (7)
3. Friends	34.2% (13)	3. Parents	31.6% (6)
4. TV	31.6% (12)	4. Friends	26.3% (5)
5. YHC / CI Program	21.1% (8)	5. Other	15.8% (3)
6. Other	13.2% (5)	6. Mother	10.5% (2)
7. Books / Magazines	5.3% (2)	7. TV	5.3% (1)
7. Internet	5.3% (2)	- Books / Magazines	--- (0)
8. Radio	2.6% (1)	- Radio	--- (0)
- Mother	--- (0)	- Internet	--- (0)
Total Mestizo Respondents	(38)	Total Indigenous Respondents	(19)

% – percentage of participants who gave the particular answer

N – number of participants who gave the particular answer



Question six was designed to find out what specifically they had learned about the topic of sex. Unfortunately, many of the answer obtained were not as useful as intended due to a lesson they had learned the day before at the retreat regarding the definition of the word sex, and the difference between sex and gender. They were instructed that the term ‘sex’ means the biological distinction between a man and a woman, and that if they wanted to talk about the act of sex, the more correct terminology would be intercourse or sexual relations. Because of this, the majority of the girls responded with the biological answer they had been taught, instead of listing what they had learned about sexual relations in general as I had hoped.

In fact, 78.9% of non-indigenous participants answered that they had learned that sex was the biological differences that differentiate a man from a woman, as did 68.4% of indigenous girls. The second most common, although infrequent, response from non-indigenous girls was about pregnancy. Two young women noted that without protection a woman can get pregnant. One participant said that every woman gets pregnant, and Participant 23 said that “it can’t be done at a very young age because it’s hard to have a child, and we have to keep studying”.

Thirty-one point six percent of indigenous ladies stated that what they had learned regarding sex was the importance of marriage and/or commitment. Participant 42 stated that sex “should be with one’s partner only”. Participants 43 and 57 said that it’s something for married people, and Participant 57 emphasized that “it’s not a game”. Survey taker 46 mentioned health, saying that it was “something better during marriage because of health reasons”. And finally Participant 44 said that “you should do it for love and not for pleasure with just anyone”.

It appears that while non-indigenous teenage girls are learning about pregnancy and STD prevention, indigenous girls are getting a moral education on when and with whom it is appropriate to engage in sexual activity.

### Question 6: What have you learned about sex?

Mestizo Participants		Indigenous Participants	
Rank Order of Response Given	% (N)	Rank Order of Response Given	% (N)
1. Biological Difference Between Man & Woman	78.9% (30)	1. Biological Difference Between Man & Woman	68.4% (13)
2. Pregnancy	13.2% (5)	2. Marriage / Commitment	31.6% (6)
3. STDs	7.9% (3)	2. Other	31.6% (6)
3. Other	7.9% (3)	3. Pregnancy	10.5% (2)
4. Marriage / Commitment	2.6% (1)	4. STDs	5.3% (1)
Total Mestizo Respondents	(38)	Total Indigenous Respondents	(19)

% – percentage of participants who gave the particular answer

N – number of participants who gave the particular answer

Question number seven was a completely open-ended question about the girls' opinions of sex. I ran into the same issue on this question as I did on survey question six because many of the girls were taking the word "sex" to mean the biological difference between a man and a woman. The most often noted answer, 52.6% of indigenous girls gave the biological answer, while slightly fewer ladino girls did, at 37.8%. It is noteworthy that the same number and percentage of non-indigenous girls gave another answer too – that sex is a good, interesting or important topic. To me this was a very noncommittal answer, and not exactly the sort of opinion I was expecting. However it is also possible that they just did not know how to answer the question or understand what the purpose of the question was. Twenty-one point one percent of indigenous girls also suggested that sex was a good, interesting or important topic.

The second most stated answer for indigenous girls fell into the category of Other, which is to be expected as this is one of the most open-ended questions on the survey. Also, because

this question asked for an opinion, the answers received were more normative and value-driven. Examples of Other answers are that it is an activity done out love (Participant 39) and Participant 54 suggested that “we shouldn’t be dirty if we don’t know something”. Three other participants mentioned the concept of respect when asked their opinions of sex. Participant 40 stated “men don’t respect”, and Participant 52 also suggested a lack of respect from men on the topic saying “when there are talks...men should respect them because they misunderstand them”. Finally, Participant 41 suggests that a woman must have respect for herself regarding sex. She stated “It shouldn’t be done with boyfriends, because then they leave and they don’t want to get married to a girl, but that is also because one is stupid and doesn’t value herself”. The responsibility is on the woman according to this indigenous responder.

Other answers for non-indigenous girls included the topic of respect as well. Participant 3 said that it is necessary to have respect when discussing sex, while Participant 24 believed that “all men should respect women”. In addition, two participants brought up the subject of choice when it came to sexual relations. Participant 38 said “the decision is mine, no one can pressure me”, but Participant 35 pointed out that “sometimes women are obligated to give themselves to men...because of the economy”. Lastly, Participant 23 thought that “it is very weird when a woman doesn’t have kids” and asked the question “Why doesn’t she get pregnant?”

Another point of note for indigenous participants is that on the previous question when asked what they had learned about sex, they mentioned marriage and commitment more often. When asked their *opinion* on sex, indigenous young women were less likely to mention marriage and commitment. Although three participants did give responses pertaining to religion, perhaps indigenous teen girls are less preoccupied with the perceived moral ramifications of sex before marriage than their parents would like them to be.

### Question 7: What is your opinion of sex?

Mestizo Participants		Indigenous Participants	
Rank Order of Response Given	% (N)	Rank Order of Response Given	% (N)
1. Biological Difference Between Man & Woman	37.8% (14)	1. Biological Difference Between Man & Woman	52.6% (10)
1. Good / Interesting / Important Topic	37.8% (14)	2. Other	31.6% (6)
2. Other	27.0% (10)	3. Good / Interesting / Important Topic	21.1% (4)
3. Wait until Older	8.1% (3)	4. Religion	15.8% (3)
4. Natural / Normal	5.4% (2)	4. Natural / Normal	15.8% (3)
4. Marriage / Relationship	5.4% (2)	5. Wait until Older	10.5% (2)
5. Religion	2.7% (1)	6. Marriage / Relationship	5.3% (1)
Total Mestizo Respondents	(37)	Total Indigenous Respondents	(19)

% – percentage of participants who gave the particular answer

N – number of participants who gave the particular answer

In question eight, I asked the girls what their parents had told them about sex. By asking this question, I was attempting to obtain more information about parental silence on the subject of sexual reproduction and health, as well as find out what kind of values and information, or perhaps misinformation, was being imparted to both groups of young women. Unfortunately, I encountered the same issue with this question as I did on questions six and seven in which many of the participants gave me their newly-learned definition of sex as the biological difference between a man and a woman, instead of explaining what their parents had taught them. In fact, for non-indigenous girls, this was the most commonly mentioned answer, tied with another response.

The other most-written response for non-indigenous girls was that their parents had told them that sex was something they should wait to do until they were older, or they should wait until marriage. Answers on this topic varied from a waiting for the right time, as Participant 3 suggests: “We have to wait for an age where we are in a very nice stage [in life], and later we won’t regret it”, to a religious norm which Participant 32 says “That it is something that out of respect for God you don’t do until you are married.” Finally, others like Participant 14 were given a serious warning from their parents to abstain from sexual relations: “That you shouldn’t have sex at a young age, and that I shouldn’t do it before or it will ruin my life because I won’t have a future.” Clearly, some parents are stressing the negative consequences of sexual relations.

The next most common responses for non-indigenous girls were that their parents hadn’t told them anything about sex, as well as the Other response. Other responses were open answers like “It’s not something that is bad to talk about in public, since it helps all of us,” (Participant 6) which points to parental approval of Youth Health Corps activities, and “It has never been said that sex is bad” (Participant 37). Two other participants recounted warnings they were given by

their parents saying “We have to take care of ourselves because men just want to take advantage of us, but only if you let them” (Participant 21) and “Sometimes men make a woman, telling them that they want to, and they should give themselves to them” (Participant 35).

For indigenous young women, the most commonly given answer for what their parents had explained to them about sex was a tie between Other and Nothing. Many of the Other answers carried a very moralistic and warning tone. Participant 44 said her parents had told her that “You have to be careful with those [men] who only want sex, and they can’t be trusted.” Participant 47 mentioned “I have to have [good] hygiene so I don’t get sick, and that I have to take care of myself,” while Participant 49 stressed that “We should be very careful and take care with our lives.” Although the answers were different, being careful was a topic that the parents of these indigenous young women stressed.

In line with much of the previous research on indigenous Maya women, 36.8% of young indigenous women, answered that their parents had told them nothing about sex, although two of the participants said that their parents had told them nothing except “Not to do it” (Participant 57) and “being careful with boyfriends and friends” (Participant 47). This suggests that the participants had not been taught anything specific about sex reproduction or health from their parents but had received general warnings.

Another warning that the indigenous girls had received from their parents was to wait until they were married or old enough to have sex. Participant 43 also noted that “it’s a sin when you aren’t married and when it’s with someone who isn’t your husband.” It is clear that most of the information that young indigenous women are receiving from their parents is based on what they should and should not do, and that they are not receiving general biological information

about puberty and sexual relations. In fact, none of the indigenous participants said that their parents had discussed sexual intercourse or sexually transmitted disease prevention with them.

### Question 8: What have your parents told you about sex?

Mestizo Participants		Indigenous Participants	
Rank Order of Response Given	% (N)	Rank Order of Response Given	% (N)
1. Biological Difference Between Man & Woman	26.3% (10)	1. Nothing	36.8% (7)
1. Wait until Older / Marriage	26.3% (10)	1. Other	36.8% (7)
2. Other	15.8% (6)	2. Wait until Older / Marriage	21.1% (4)
2. Nothing	15.8% (6)	3. Pregnancy Protection	15.8% (3)
3. Sexual Intercourse	13.2% (5)	4. Biological Difference Between Man & Woman	10.5% (2)
4. STD Protection	7.9% (3)	- Sexual Intercourse	--- (0)
5. Pregnancy Prevention	2.6% (1)	- STD Protection	--- (0)
Total Mestizo Respondents	(38)	Total Indigenous Respondents	(19)

% – percentage of participants who gave the particular answer

N – number of participants who gave the particular answer

Finally, with question nine I sought to determine whether or not the mandatory sexual education in Guatemala was actually being implemented. I was also interested in what approach schools were taking in teaching sexual matters, and if there was a difference between what the young non-indigenous girls were learning and what indigenous girls were being taught in school. One non-indigenous participant did not answer the question, so the yes/no part of the question is based on 56 answers.

For non-indigenous young women, 97.3% said yes, they had been taught about sexual health and reproduction in school. Only one non-indigenous participant (2.7%) replied that she

had not learned anything yet. For indigenous Maya girls, the majority at 84.9% said yes they had learned about sex in school, yet three girls, or 15.8%, said that they had not been taught about sexual health and reproduction at school. Because formal sex education in Guatemala does not generally begin until middle school, I examined the ages of these three indigenous girls to determine if they simply were not old enough to have learned about sexual health and reproduction in school. Two of the participants were fifteen years old, so they most likely were old enough to have received education, while one participant was thirteen. It is possible that she just had not reached the grade level in middle school where she would receive sexual education. Nevertheless, the findings on this question do seem to go along with the research that indigenous girls have less access to sexual education.

**Question 9a: Have you learned about sexual health and reproduction in school?**

Mestizo Participants		Indigenous Participants	
	% (N)		% (N)
Yes	97.3% (36)	Yes	84.2% (16)
No	2.7% (1)	No	15.8% (3)
Total Mestizo Respondents	(37)	Total Indigenous Respondents	(19)

% – percentage of participants who gave the particular answer

N – number of participants who gave the particular answer

The second part of question nine asked girls specifically to note what they had been taught. The analysis for this question is based on answer from fifty participants. This is due to the fact that one non-indigenous participant did not answer the question, and four young women (one non-indigenous and three indigenous) replied that they had not learned about sex in school. Additionally, two participants did not answer the question in a meaningful way. Non-indigenous



Participant number 16 said that “it is very important for adolescents like us”, while indigenous Participant 35 said she had learned “that every man and woman” and did not finish the statement.

At a 29.4% frequency, the two topics that non-indigenous participants noted most often that they had learned about were general anatomy and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, many participants specifically noting HIV and AIDS. After those two topics, non-indigenous girls mentioned being taught about condom usage and general health. As research suggests, the information that the non-indigenous women were taught touches on fairly morally neutral subject matter.

The most commonly taught areas for indigenous participants were sexually transmitted disease prevention and pregnancy prevention, both at 31.3% frequency. The next most-mentioned set of data is more value-based than the information being provided to non-indigenous girls. Twenty-five percent of these girls noted being taught about general anatomy, but 25% also stated that they had been taught to abstain from sex or wait until they were old enough or married. This is compared to the 11.8% of mestizo girls who reported being taught to abstain. Participant 51 stated that she had learned that sex is something “that’s between a man and a woman when they get married to have kids.” Another participant, Participant 45, simply stated that she had been taught “abstinence.”

In addition, 25% of indigenous young women said that they had received a warning or judgment about proper sexual conduct. Two participants mentioned the need to be careful, with Participant 52 saying that being sexually healthy means “being careful with what they do and think about it”, while Participant 54 simply stated “we should be careful.” Lastly, the most morally-charged lesson taught came from Participant 49 who said “That we should value

ourselves like God values us, and be so respectful and not be vulgar.” The topics of religion and being careful are common among indigenous participants.

Where participants’ answers do coincide is in what they are not learning about. Only one girl from each group noted that they had been given information about birth control pills. In Guatemala, birth control pills can be obtained from a pharmacy without a prescription, however one must ask for them from behind the counter. In addition to the relatively high price of birth control pills, which could be prohibitive, many young women would most likely be too nervous or ashamed to purchase them. Perhaps educational institutions do not frequently discuss the use of birth control pills as a means of contraception because of young women’s hesitancy to buy them and because of the cost. Failure of schools to teach about birth control pills could also quite possibly have to do with religious norms that preach against women’s use of the pill.

**Question 9b: What have you been taught in school about sexual health and reproduction?**

<b>Mestizo Participants</b>		<b>Indigenous Participants</b>	
<b>Rank Order of Response Given</b>	<b>% (N)</b>	<b>Rank Order of Response Given</b>	<b>% (N)</b>
1. Anatomy	29.4% (10)	1. STD Prevention	31.3% (5)
1. STD Prevention	29.4% (10)	1. Pregnancy	31.3% (5)
2. Condom Usage	23.5% (8)	2. Judgment / Warning	25.0% (4)
3. General Health	20.6% (7)	2. Anatomy	25.0% (4)
4. Other	14.7% (5)	2. Wait until Older / Abstain / Marriage	25.0% (4)
5. Wait until Older / Abstain / Marriage	11.8% (4)	3. Condom Usage	18.8% (3)
5. Judgment / Warning	11.8% (4)	4. General Health	12.5% (2)
6. Pregnancy	5.9% (2)	4. Other	12.5% (2)
7. Birth Control Pill	2.9% (1)	5. Birth Control Pill	6.3% (1)
Total Mestizo Respondents	(34)	Total Indigenous Respondents	(16)

% – percentage of participants who gave the particular answer

N – number of participants who gave the particular answer

## CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

In analyzing the survey data, it is noteworthy that both non-indigenous mestizo young women and Kaqchikel Maya indigenous young women have much in common in regard to sexual health and education. In fact, for most questions both groups of ladies answered in very similar ways. Nevertheless, the variances between these two sets of women become more apparent when they are asked explain their answers or to give an opinion on a particular subject. It is clear that these women have different motivations and learned beliefs on sex and sexuality. Non-indigenous ladino girls are concerned with their futures and avoiding pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. On the other hand, many of the Maya girls' answers to many of the questions contained references to morals, values and in some cases, religion. Old, Spanish-imposed ideals of chastity are still very much a part of their lives.

For both groups the issue of pregnancy prevention was obviously stated as extremely important for them to learn. Also, both groups of girls noted at an even higher frequency that their peers should be learning about pregnancy prevention. Mestizo girls' reasons behind this were to prevent early-age pregnancies because girls aren't ready yet and because pregnancy can lead to a girl's education being cut short. Indigenous participants suggested more serious consequences such as ruining one's life. This is reminiscent of *marianismo* in which a girl must follow the strict example of the Virgin Mary and remain a virgin until marriage, or risk damaging her reputation and her family's.

Another commonality that indigenous and non-indigenous young women share is whom they will and will not talk to about sex. Both say they will talk to their mothers, and finding someone who they trust is a key factor. Indigenous and mestizo groups mentioned feeling too embarrassed or uncomfortable to talk to certain people, most often their fathers. I would suggest

that this harkens back to the old honor-shame code, in which women were not allowed to discuss topics of a sexual nature and had to be extremely mindful of their interactions with men.

Indigenous women, however, were most likely to bring up issues of being misperceived or even afraid when discussing sexual matters. Notably, indigenous young women also stated frequently that a major reason they *would* be willing to discuss sexual topics with someone was if that person were a specialist or had knowledge of the subject. For Kaqchikel Maya girls the taboo of discussing sex is mitigated by the informant's expertise and professionalism.

Throughout the research I also saw a discrepancy in sexual knowledge between both groups. The issue of a need for more information on reproductive anatomy and general biological sexual processes was raised several times by indigenous girls. Fewer indigenous girls cited being taught about sex in school as compared to non-indigenous girls. Those Maya girls who did learn about sexual matters in school were more often taught that they should wait to have sex until they were married. In indigenous communities with a conservative Protestant or Catholic following, abstinence education would certainly be the most approved teaching method among parents who wish to safeguard their children's virtue, as well as among teachers who perhaps would not feel comfortable imparting other information about sexual health and reproduction. It is also possible that due to the Maya people's marginalized status in Guatemala, indigenous schools simply are not given the necessary resources to teach sexual education.

It seems that mestizo girls, while not learning as much as they could about sexual reproduction, have much better access to information in school. They also receive more information from their parents and even from television. Also, the main focus of their education in school is not solely based on morality, although at home, parents are definitely still teaching their children that waiting until marriage to have sex is the best option.

In addition, a commonly mentioned topic raised by both groups of women was the issue of respect in regard to sex. This fits in closely with the honor-shame code in which women must be careful not to commit any sexual transgressions. On more than one question young women showed a learned mistrust of men, citing issues of men taking advantage of women, men lying or not taking the subject seriously or only wanting one thing from a girl. Both groups of participants also noted that a woman should wait until she was married to have sex. Many of these ideas were clearly imparted to them by their parents to serve as a warning to keep away from boys and men in order to protect oneself.

I would suggest this protection goes beyond simply avoiding unwanted pregnancies and extends to protecting one's honor in the community as well. On average, the young indigenous women mentioned the issues taking care of themselves or being careful more often than did the young mestizo women. Indigenous women mentioned taking care not to get pregnant or contract STDs just as the mestizo women did, but they also sought to protect their reputations and even what people would think about them for asking questions about sexual reproduction. This feeling of possible physical or social endangerment could stem from the marginalization that many indigenous people in Guatemala have faced for centuries and still face today. In addition, situations their own mothers lived through during the civil war could have led them to teach their daughters to be careful in daily life and especially in relationships.

Another subject that indigenous girls offered was rights and equality - a woman's right to healthcare and the value of women. The discourse of rights is very much a part of their daily lives. Children International-Guatemala Field Officer, Héctor Roché, explains that in the indigenous communities, parallel indigenous governing groups operate in an effort to maintain indigenous culture and customs. He states "the indigenous young ladies, unlike the urban girls,

are placed as minorities and their heads are filled with ideas of how they deserve respect because they are indigenous. That is why they have more access to laws and rights” (my translation). Ideas of respect and rights are also found in some of the components of the Youth Health Corps, and perhaps because of this, these ideas resonate with Maya girls more so than with the non-indigenous members.

Throughout the various workshops the word respect or being respectful is used frequently; however the context in which it is used is generally for respecting others’ beliefs, ideas or feelings during the trainings. I think the workshops could take it one step further and incorporate Respecting Women as a part of the life skills taught to the youth. In male-dominated and often macho Latin America, it seems particularly important to raise the issue of the value of women and what respectful behavior towards them looks like.

Having reviewed the data, it is clear to me that parents are a key component in their children’s sexual education. While many parents do not discuss sexual matters with their children due to embarrassment or because they feel like it is an inappropriate subject, it also appears that some parents simply do not have sufficient information on the subject to teach their own children. This seems especially true in the case of indigenous parents when young indigenous girls look outside the home to specialists to learn about sexual health and reproduction.

Although, as Reyes explained, parents are invited to the beginning-of-the-year Youth Health Corps Orientation, as well as the end-of-the-year ceremony, I do not believe this takes parental involvement far enough. Training classes on the subjects of sexual health and reproduction could be helpful for parents as well. Qualified adult staff members could hold training session for parents and inform them on basic anatomy and reproduction, as well as teach

them techniques to discuss the topics with their children. Using the same model as the Youth Health Corps employs with adolescents, Children International's wide network of volunteer mothers could also be trained as Peer Educators to impart their knowledge onto other parents in the community. These classes would not only be important to the adults in terms of their own health and knowledge, but they could also teach their younger children when the time comes and pave the way for more informed Youth Health Corps members in the future.

In all, both groups of young women do seem to be more open to the topic of sex and perhaps less biased about the subject than their mothers and grandmothers, as shown in previous research. It is possible though that the Youth Health Corps attracts these types of young women, while those who do not participate are less open to learning about and discussing the subject. Interestingly enough, I feel like the responses I obtained from the indigenous girls, who are traditionally seen as shy and reserved, were more honest and open than the responses I received from the generally less conservative mestizo girls. Answers from non-indigenous girls seemed more textbook style, as if they were trying to figure out what the 'correct' answer was for each question. Despite this, the responses were helpful in gaining more information about the attitudes and knowledge indigenous and non-indigenous girls in Guatemala hold on matters of sex and sexuality.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Because of the limited nature of the survey when considering time constraints and subject matter, there are several opportunities for further research. One of the more obvious angles for new research would be to conduct the survey again, this time asking the same questions of the male participants. Without a doubt, the answers would be quite different, and perhaps



motivations would vary significantly as well. One could also repeat the survey with the girls who participated in the second Youth Health Corps Peer Educator Retreat a month later. The downside to that would be a very small number of indigenous participants. Another route of investigation could be to compare the answers by age group or by years in the YHC instead of comparing indigenous and non-indigenous girls to see if age or education through the Youth Health Corps has any bearing on what the girls know and believe about sexual health and reproduction. In addition, the questions in the survey could be reworked or rewritten. Specifically, I would have liked to have had the opportunity to re-ask questions six through nine removing the term “sex” and replacing it with “sexual intercourse” or “sexual relations” in order to get more direct responses. Finally, it might also be very interesting to ask the same survey questions of the mothers of the YHC participants to see how opinions and knowledge have changed throughout the years.

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## APPENDIX 1: SURVEY QUESTIONS – ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Instructions: Respond in full and anonymously. You can write on the other side of the sheet indicating the corresponding question number.

How long have you been participating in the Youth Health Corps (YHC)?



\_\_\_\_ It is my first year \_\_\_\_ one year \_\_\_\_ two years or more

I am: \_\_\_\_ indigenous \_\_\_\_ non-indigenous.

Age: \_\_\_\_

1. What do you most hope to learn from the YHC, or what has been the most valuable thing you have learned so far? (Reproductive anatomy, STD prevention, personal hygiene, pregnancy prevention, etc.)
2. What do you think the most important YHC topic for young women to learn is? Why?
3. When you have questions about sex and relationships, who do talk to? Why?
4. Who would you not want to discuss sex with? Why?
5. Where do you get most of your information about sex? (no one, parents, school, friends, TV, partner, etc.)
6. What have you learned about sex?
7. What is your opinion of sex?
8. What have your parents told you about sex?
9. Have you learned about sexual health and reproduction in school? If yes, what were you taught?

## APPENDIX 2: SURVEY QUESTIONS – ORIGINAL SPANISH VERSION

	<p><b>Instrucciones:</b> Responde ampliamente y de forma anónima. Puedes escribir atrás de la hoja indicando a que número corresponde tu respuesta.</p> <p><b>¿Por cuánto tiempo has participado en el Cuerpo de Salud de Jóvenes (CSJ)?</b>          Es mi primer año <input type="text"/> Un año <input type="text"/> Dos años o más <input type="text"/>          Soy: indígena <input type="text"/> no indígena <input type="text"/>          Edad: <input type="text"/></p>	
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1. ¿Qué esperas aprender en el Cuerpo de Salud, o cuál ha sido la cosa más valiosa que has aprendido hasta hoy?  
(Anatomía reproductiva, prevención de ETS, higiene personal, prevención de embarazos, etc.)

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2. ¿Cuál es el tema más importante del CSJ que las señoritas aprenden? ¿Por qué?

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3. ¿Cuando tienes dudas acerca del sexo o las relaciones amorosas, con quién pláticas? ¿Por qué?

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4. ¿Con quién(es) no te sientes cómoda al hablar del sexo? ¿Por qué?

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5. ¿Dónde obtienes información o aprendes sobre el sexo? (De nadie, padres, colegio, amigos, pareja, televisión, etc.)

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6. ¿Qué has aprendido sobre el sexo?

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7. ¿Qué opinas sobre el sexo?

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8. ¿Qué te han dicho tus padres acerca del sexo?

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9. ¿Has aprendido sobre la salud sexual y reproducción en el colegio? ¿Qué te enseñaron?

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### APPENDIX 3: MAP OF GUATEMALA WITH SURVEY AREAS NOTED

Map of Guatemala Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin. Edits and notations, mine.

